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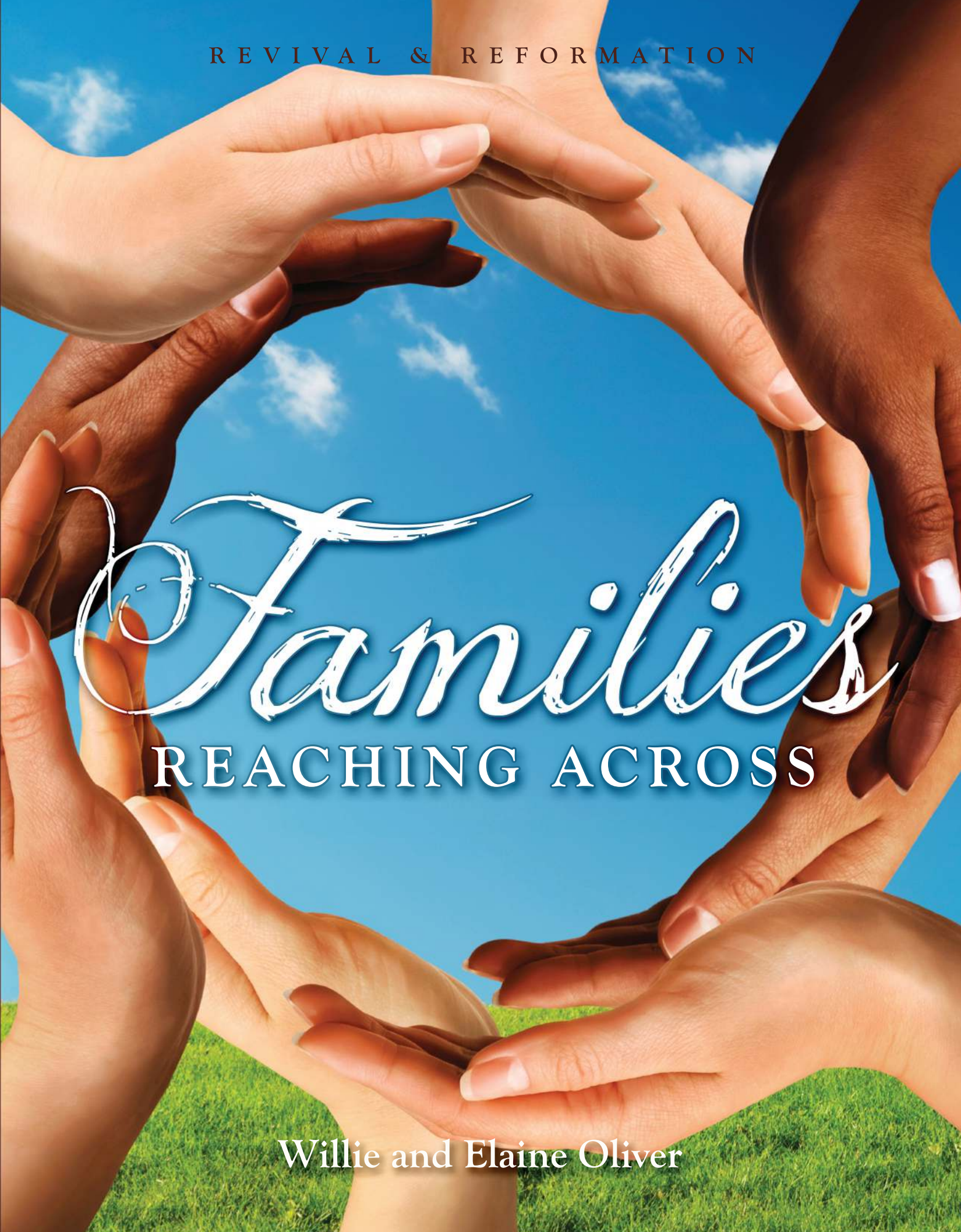

# Families
## REACHING ACROSS

Willie and Elaine Oliver

REVIVAL & REFORMATION

# Families REACHING ACROSS


***Willie and Elaine Oliver***

***with Paul Anderson, Alina Baltazar, Kathleen Beagles, Paul Bogacs, Marcos Bomfim, Angela Brown, Rosemay Cangy, Tamanda Chanza, Claudio and Pamela Consuegra, Lea Danihelova, Denise Dunzweiler, Trafford Fischer, Pedro Iglesias, Sally Lam-Phoon, Barna Magyarosi, Jongimpi Papu, Clair and Jon Sanches and Alanzo Smith***

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# Preface

Being a Christian suggests one is a disciple of Christ and that one loves Him with all one's heart, soul, and mind. The synoptic gospels are emphatic about this reality in Matthew 22, Mark 12 and Luke 10.

Matthew's account (22:37-39) reads: "Jesus said to him, 'You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your mind.' This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like it: 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself.'"

Jesus overwhelmingly summarizes the breadth and depth of what God wants for His children: to love God and to love people. A careful read of God's Word suggests revival is truly functional only as reformation is present in the life of the Christian. A characteristic of reformation is to be intentionally loving and kind to people we come in contact with, including members of our respective families, as we reach out to them with the grace and compassion of Jesus Christ.

In Philippians 2:4, the apostle Paul declares: "Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others." By definition, living the Christian life is about doing for others because we are thinking about others as we become more and more like Jesus. Paul urges believers to have the mind of Christ in order to live a life like Christ's.

Ellen White asserts in *The Adventist Home*: "All should cultivate patience by practicing patience. By being kind and forbearing, true love may be kept warm in the heart, and qualities will be developed that Heaven will approve." (p. 106).

The notion of cultivating patience by practicing patience is the work of the Spirit of God. It is the fruit—the result—of the Spirit as Paul underscores in Galatians 5:22. Without the constant presence of God's Spirit in our lives it is impossible to practice those virtues that make reaching across to others not only meaningful but transformational.

It is our hope the contents of this volume will assist pastors and Family Ministries leaders all over the world to communicate to individuals and families in our churches the importance of reaching across to neighbors, relatives and friends in a ministry of compassion and grace. The truth is revival and reformation will only be truly operational in the lives of Christians as we heed the second greatest commandment of loving our neighbors as ourselves. We pray this for our world church family this year as we daily drink from the fountain of God's Word so we are full to overflowing with the wonderful love of Jesus Christ.

Maranatha!

For stronger and healthier families,

*Willie and Elaine Oliver, Directors*
*Department of Family Ministries*
*General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church*
*World Headquarters*
*Silver Spring, Maryland*

# How to Use This Planbook

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

***Christian Home and Marriage Week: February 8-15***

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

> ***Christian Marriage Day: Sabbath, February 8, (Emphasizes Marriage)***
> Use the Marriage Sermon for worship service and the Marriage Seminar during a Friday evening, Sabbath afternoon or Saturday night program.
>
> ***Christian Home Day: Sabbath, February 15, (Emphasizes Parenting)***
> Use the Parenting Sermon for worship service and the Parenting Seminar during a Friday evening, Sabbath afternoon or Saturday night program.

***Family Togetherness Week: September 7-13***

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

> ***Family Togetherness Day: Sabbath, September 13 (Emphasizes the Church Family)***
> Use the Family Sermon for the worship service and the Family Seminar for a Friday evening, Sabbath afternoon and/or Saturday night program.

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

This resource also includes a disk with Microsoft PowerPoint® presentations of the seminars. 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.

# Lessons From the Lazarus Syndrome

*By Willie and Elaine Oliver*

**Text: John 11:1-44**

## *Introduction*

It was damp and cold that late afternoon in March 2013 when our train arrived in Venice. After almost two weeks in Italy for several ministry events of the Inter-European Division we were getting ready to take a plane home the following morning after a very demanding five weeks on the road.

Tired and a bit road-weary we flirted with the idea of just going to sleep. But, we were in Venice, one of the most important tourist destinations in the world for its celebrated art and architecture, in addition to its restaurants, shops, canals, gondolas and scores of gelato outlets all over the island.

We would not forgive ourselves later if we passed up the opportunity to visit for a little while, despite having been here before. Venice is the kind of town you can visit many times and still want to return to experience it again. So, we took the #5 bus in front of our hotel near Marco Polo Airport on what is considered the mainland—to Piazzale Roma—after crossing the Ponte della Libertà bridge, from where we could take a water taxi to Piazza San Marco, or one of several famous stops along the way, or simply take the 35-minute walk to the square.

We chose to walk. Bad mistake. It was now dark and the precipitation from above had become heavier than a drizzle as the wind increased its strength. Despite streetlights—a path that was relatively easy to negotiate during daylight by simply following the signs—exhaustion combined with the variables above took us far out of our way before we really knew what had taken place.

We were lost! The once crowded streets were now empty and deserted. The Grand Canal was to our right—we had never walked that far before—it was dark, windy, rainy and scary, as the

shadows played games with our minds. What was supposed to be an evening of a little leisure and relaxation had turned to concern and apprehension about how we would get through this predicament intact. We prayed for peace and guidance. After several minutes of what seemed like an eternity, we came around a corner to a water taxi stop and a boat ride that took us to familiar and safer surroundings once more.

Our lives on earth are filled with unpredictable circumstances. Before we are fully aware of our condition, our future is catapulted into a completely unexpected reality. In the midst of such difficulty, God is calling us to know Him, to trust Him and to reach across to help our brothers and sisters confronting the volatility, instability and complexities of life in the Third Millennium.

Let us pray.

## *I. The News of Lazarus' Illness*

In John 11:1-16 the Bible declares:

> Now a certain man was sick, Lazarus of Bethany, the town of Mary and her sister Martha. It was that Mary who anointed the Lord with fragrant oil and wiped His feet with her hair, whose brother Lazarus was sick. Therefore the sisters sent to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom You love is sick." When Jesus heard that, He said, "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God may be glorified through it." Now Jesus loved Martha and her sister and Lazarus. So when He heard that he was sick, He stayed two more days in in the place where He was. Then after this He said to His disciples, "Let us go to Judea again." The disciples said to Him, "Rabbi, lately the Jews sought to stone You, and are You going there again?" Jesus answered, "Are there not twelve hours in the day? If anyone walks in the day, he does not stumble, because he sees the light of this world. But if one walks in the night, he stumbles, because the light is not in him." These things He said to them, "Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up." Then His disciples said, "Lord, if he sleeps he will get well." However, Jesus spoke of his death, but they thought that He was speaking about taking rest in sleep. Then Jesus said to them plainly, "Lazarus is dead. And I am glad for your sakes that I was not there, that you may believe. Nevertheless let us go to him." Then Thomas, who is called the Twin, said to his fellow disciples, "Let us also go, that we may die with Him."

Jesus was greatly despised by the religious rulers in Jerusalem. With nothing but empty rituals to offer a people growing weary of Roman oppression and religious posturing requiring much but offering little, the arrival of Jesus on the spiritual scene was transformational to the descendants of Abraham who awaited Messiah.

After being baptized by his cousin John at the Jordan River and being identified by God as the promised One through the agency of a dove descending on Him and the audible voice of God affirming Him, Jesus accepts His first disciples and performs His first miracle of turning water into wine at a wedding in Cana in the region of Galilee.

Following the miracle in Cana, which strengthens the faith of the disciples, Jesus spends a few days in Capernaum with His mother, brothers and disciples, then heads to Jerusalem where He cleanses the temple of those who had forgotten it was a place to worship God rather than a place to make money at the expense of the others. He catches the attention of the religious leaders who feel indicted for their lack of spiritual honesty and gains mortal enemies who begin to plot against His life.

Many miracles follow to help impress on the minds of all that Jesus is no ordinary prophet. There is the man healed at the pool of Bethesda on the Sabbath, the feeding of the five thousand, the healing of the sick, the woman caught in adultery who receives forgiveness and the healing of a blind man on the Sabbath who later is thrown out of the temple by the leaders. These and greater signs follow the Son of Mary and Joseph.

Every subsequent act by Jesus to break the bonds of Satan on the people, strengthens their belief in Him as Messiah and raises the ire of the discredited religious leaders. With their power gone and their stature irrelevant before the masses, they plot to get rid of Jesus. This is where Jesus finds himself when He receives the message of Lazarus' illness.

Lazarus, Martha and Mary were special friends of Jesus. To be sure, they were faithful disciples of the Galilean Rabbi. But, more than that, they were family. In an atmosphere charged with suspicion and vile hostility against Him by the Pharisees and Sadducees—religious leaders of the day—the home of this trio in Bethany had become a welcome oasis where Jesus could relax and leave the stresses of His daily ministry behind.

The resurrection of Lazarus is only recorded by the gospel of John. The synoptic gospels (Matthew, Mark and Luke) confine themselves to what Christ did in Galilee, which is where He spent most of His time. This miracle is more largely recorded than any of the other miracles of Christ because in itself is a great proof of His mission and a precursor of that which is to be the crowning proof of all—Christ's own resurrection (Henry, 1994).

Jesus' response to the news that Lazarus was ill was confusing to the disciples. Martha and Mary had sent a messenger to share the sad news with Jesus. Surely, they would not have gone through all that trouble if the situation was not dire, dismal and potentially disastrous. And yet, Jesus takes the news in a calm, cool and collected way. "This sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God…" (John 11:4).

Two days after Jesus receives the news about Lazarus He tells His disciples they should go to Judea—the area that included Jerusalem, was within two miles from Bethany—where Lazarus, Martha and Mary lived. The disciples do not understand Jesus. Two days earlier when He could have done something about the obvious terminal illness of Lazarus, since they had witnessed His healing power before, Jesus seems aloof. Now that there is no compelling reason to go to Bethany, the disciples are concerned for the safety of Jesus, since it is no longer a secret the rulers in Jerusalem are plotting His demise. And the recent beheading of John the Baptist without the intervention of Jesus raises doubt, ever so slightly, about the true person of Jesus.

About this reality Ellen White declares in *The Desire of Ages:*

> During the two days Christ seemed to have dismissed the message from His mind; for He did not speak of Lazarus. The disciples thought of John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus. They had wondered why Jesus, with the power to perform wonderful miracles, had permitted John to languish in prison, and to die a violent death. Possessing such power, why did not Christ save John's life? This question had often been asked by the Pharisees, who represented it as an unanswerable argument against Christ's claim to be the Son of God. The Saviour had warned His disciples of trials, losses, and persecution. Would He forsake them in trial? Some questioned if they had mistaken His mission. All were deeply troubled (1940, p. 526).

## *II. Jesus Visits the Bereaved Sisters*

In John 11:17-32 the record offers:

> So when Jesus came, He found that he had already been in the tomb four days. Now Bethany was near Jerusalem, about two miles away. And many of the Jews had joined the women around Martha and Mary, to comfort them concerning their brother. Now Martha, as soon as she heard that Jesus was coming, went and met Him, but Mary was sitting in the house. Now Martha said to Jesus, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died. But even now I know that whatever You ask of God, God will give You." Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise again." Martha said to Him, "I know that he will rise again in the resurrection at the last day." Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" She said to Him, "Yes, Lord, I believe that You are the Christ, the Son of God, who is to come into the world." And when she had said these things, she went her way and secretly called Mary her sister, saying, "The teacher has come and is calling you." As soon as she heard that, she arose quickly and came to Him. Now Jesus had not yet come into the town, but was in the place where Martha met Him. Then the Jews who were with her in the house, and comforting her, when they saw that Mary rose up quickly and went out, followed her, saying, "She is going to the tomb to weep there." Then, when Mary came where Jesus was, and saw Him, she fell down at His feet, saying to Him, "Lord, if You had been here, my brother would not have died."

The pain of Martha and Mary is palpable as each takes their turn talking to Jesus. Instructive is the reality that despite their disappointment and utter grief, independently, both confess their faith in Jesus and who He says He is. Both sisters also earnestly believe that had Jesus been in Bethany their brother would not have died. What an amazing faith!

The truth is, had Jesus been in Bethany during Lazarus' illness he would not have died. Despite the reality that His disciples and Martha and Mary could not understand His response at the moment, Jesus' decision to delay coming to visit Lazarus during his illness was for the very

purpose of strengthening the faith of His disciples—who would have to endure much after His ascension—as well as the faith of Martha and Mary, who would need to be convinced that Jesus was truly the awaited Messiah. Jesus also wanted to give evidence to many who still did not believe in Him that He was truly Who He claimed to be, the Son of God and the Savior of the world.

Matthew Henry elucidates this notion by stating: "Christ's miracles in Galilee were more numerous, but those in or near Jerusalem were more *illustrious*; there He healed one that had been diseased thirty-eight years, another that had been blind *from his birth*, and raised one that had been dead four days" (1994).

Ellen White adds:

> Had Christ been in the sickroom, Lazarus would not have died; for Satan would have had no power over him…Therefore Christ remained away. He suffered the enemy to exercise his power, that He might drive him back, a conquered foe…In delaying to come to Lazarus, Christ had a purpose of mercy toward those who had not received Him. He tarried that by raising Lazarus from the dead He might give to His stubborn, unbelieving people another evidence that He was indeed "the resurrection, and the life" (1940, pp.528, 529).

## *III. Jesus Raises Lazarus from the Dead*

The Biblical account submits in John 11:33-44:

> Therefore, when Jesus saw her weeping, and the Jews who came with her weeping, He groaned in the spirit and was troubled. And He said, "Where have you laid him?" They said to Him, "Lord, come and see." Jesus wept. Then the Jews said, "See how He loved him!" And some of them said, "Could not this Man, who opened the eyes of the blind, also have kept this man from dying?" Then Jesus, again groaning in Himself, came to the tomb. It was a cave, and a stone lay against it. Jesus said, "Take away the stone." Martha, the sister of him who was dead, said to Him, "Lord, by this time there is a stench, for he has been dead four days." Jesus said to her, "Did I not say to you that if you would believe you would see the glory of God?" Then they took away the stone from the place where the dead man was lying. And Jesus lifted up His eyes and said, "Father, I thank You that You have heard Me. And I know that You always hear Me, but because of the people who are standing by I said this, that they may believe that You sent Me." Now when He had said these things, He cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come forth!" And he who died came out bound hand and foot with graveclothes, and his face was wrapped with a cloth. Jesus said to them, "Loose him, and let him go."

What an exceptional reality! That Jesus, knowing He is going to raise Lazarus from the dead, can still feel the pain of human suffering and empathize to the point of tears. This narrative, more than any other in Scripture, dramatizes how much Christ identifies with human suffering.

Jesus asks to see Lazarus as He nears the grave and asks that the stone covering the grave be removed. Martha objects, either to protect Jesus from the stench of the decomposing body—it's been four days since Lazarus was laid in the tomb—or to try to preserve her brother's dignity from being exposed to the public in a state of putrefaction. Jesus gently reminds Martha who He is, and goes on to do what He has come to do.

Having been accused of performing miracles by the power of Satan and wanting to set the record straight about who He is, Jesus calls on the Father, so it is unequivocal He is calling on the power of God. Jesus also wants to model for His disciple that the power they will use in the future is that of God and not their own. The life giver commands Lazarus to come forth; not to come down or to come up, for Lazarus is neither in heaven nor in hell, but in the ground where he knew nothing. As the writer of Ecclesiastes aptly declares: "For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Their love and their hate and their envy have already perished, and forever they have no more share in all that is done under the sun" (9:5, 6).

At the call of Jesus, Ellen White shares: "There is a stir in the silent tomb, and he who was dead stands at the door of the sepulcher. His movements are impeded by the graveclothes in which he was laid away, and Christ says to the astonished spectators, 'Loose him, and let him go'" (1940, p. 536).

Breaking with human convention, Lazarus comes to life, greeted with joy and thanksgiving by his grieving sisters, who receive their brother as a gift from the Master.

Regardless of the difficult circumstances in our lives we should always remember God is in control, He cares for us and He will see us through.

## *IV. The Impact of the Miracle on the Witnesses*

In John 11:45-48 the record reads:

> Then many of the Jews who had come to Mary, and had seen the things Jesus did, believed in Him. But some of them went away to the Pharisees and told them the things Jesus did. Then the chief priests and the Pharisees gathered a council and said, "What shall we do? For this Man works many signs. If we let Him alone like this, everyone will believe in Him, and the Romans will come and take away both our place and nation."

Human reaction to the unprecedented and spectacular is truly remarkable. It is indisputable that Lazarus was once dead and is now alive. Those who are prone to believe do so with astounding faith. However, those who choose to be skeptical in the face of truth will find reasons to doubt and not believe in Jesus. Our commitment should be to share Jesus, for there is always someone willing to believe the evidences presented by God's providence and Word.

## *Conclusion*

Lazarus was dead when Jesus arrived at the tomb. Arriving at the grave on time (four days after Lazarus' death), in order to bring enlightenment and salvation to many, Jesus calls on his friend Lazarus who hears His voice from the grave and begins to stir. When we hear the voice of Jesus, no matter where we are—what place, what condition, what circumstances, what illicit relationship—if we are going to live again we must respond. Lazarus hears the voice, and responds, but he is still in grave clothes. He must be loosed by the process of the faith resident in the body of Christ; the families in the church.

This is what *families reaching across* is all about: walking with Jesus to the site where those who are dead are brought back to newness of life, and as members of the family of God assume our responsibility of discipling new believers out of the grave clothes of their past lives of sin.

In Isaiah 55:8,9 the very relevant message is shared: "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways, says the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts." We will often not understand God's ways; why things happen as they do. But, we must be in tune with the Spirit of God to know God knows what He is doing and is working things out for our good; since "…all things work together for good to those who love God…" (Romans 8:28).

God has called us to share with our relatives, neighbors and friends our experiences of His faithfulness in times of discouragement, despondency and despair. That evening in Venice was simply a reminder from God to us that despite situations of apprehension, hesitation and trepidation, we should never fail to place our confidence in Him. After all He reminds us by pointing us to His Word in Isaiah 41:10: "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."

May God help us to learn Lessons from the Lazarus Syndrome and by so doing grow in our faith and confidence in Him.

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# Guide them Playfully Towards the Kingdom of God

*By Clair and Jon Sanches*

## *Introduction*

One day a student in India, feeling depressed about himself, went to his philosophy professor asking him, "Professor, what is the true value of a human being?" Giving him a stone, the professor said, "Try to discover its value." The boy went to the market place and asked the greengrocer, "What will you give for this stone?" "5 kilos of potatoes," the greengrocer said. He went next to the fishmonger. "Ten tuna fish," he said. Noticing the value increasing he went to the jeweler on the block. "I will give you one thousand rupee," he said. Finally he took courage and went to the village's most famous jeweler. The jeweler took the stone, went to the back of his shop, and stayed away for a while. Very excited he came back and exclaimed: "Young man, be very careful with this stone, it is of tremendous value. Don't ever sell it. You can ask anything for it." Holding tightly to the stone, he went back to his professor and shared his experience. "It's just like this with human beings," his professor said. "It all depends on how much you value yourself. Some have a low self-esteem and give themselves away cheaply. Those with a high sense of value are not cheap to get. The more you realize your true value the happier you will be."

## *God Values Each Person Individually*

A healthy self-esteem is of great value to any person. To a large extent this sense of value determines the way we feel about ourselves. Exposing children to this basic sense of awareness is a primary task of the family. This same principle applies to the church family. It is important to express appreciation and communicate a sense of appreciation to each other in the church family. Especially when interacting with children and young people, this is of vital importance. It is more difficult to accept God's unconditional love and come to full awareness of Jesus' love, when our sense of value has been damaged by the way we have been treated. The apostle Peter says: "knowing that you were not redeemed with corruptible things, like silver or gold, from your aimless conduct received by tradition from your fathers, but with the precious blood of Christ, as

of a lamb without blemish and without spot" (1 Peter 1:18, 19). God paid the highest price in Jesus for every baby born on this planet. Therefore any human that does not inherit the new earth, is a wasted life. Every human being is worth the blood of Jesus.

## *God's Commission to the Families of Israel*

God highly regards the family. He entrusted us with the gift of procreation and the awesome responsibility to care for our children. Jesus entered this world as a vulnerable baby and entrusted himself to the care of a family. God himself revealed to His servant Moses, the universal blueprint for how to raise families.

> Hear, O Israel: The Lord is 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)

In other words when you relate to children and young people, when you play with them, work with them, care for them; guide them playfully and prayerfully into the life everlasting. God's **primary** call to all parents and adults in every culture is commitment and bonding to Himself, the ultimate source of love and life. Here is where it all starts, a personal attachment and solid foundation grounded and rooted in Jesus. Then He commissions parents to inspire and guide the next generation to connect with their Creator and Savior. In the book of Psalms, the deep desire to guide the next generation to connect with God is expressed in a beautiful and heartfelt prayer:

> Give ear, O my people, to my law; incline your ears to the words of my mouth. 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. For He established a testimony in Jacob, and appointed a law in Israel, which He commanded our fathers, that they should make them known to their children; that the generation to come might know them, the children who would be born, that they may arise and declare them to their children, that they may set their hope in God, and not forget the works of God, but keep his commandments. (Psalms 78:1-7)

**Why was it so important to remind the families of Israel of their primary task?** Moses addressed a generation of parents who were born in the desert, whose children would grow up in the Promised Land. The next generation would thus, not know, the Egyptian experience of slavery. They would not know the cruelty of a life in bondage to Pharaoh and utter dependence on God.

They would not know God's miraculous deliverance. All they would know was the land of milk and honey and material prosperity. They would be able to purchase their own piece of land and build their own homes. Their grandparents had experienced the Exodus and depended on God during the uncertainties of desert life. But the children in Canaan would not have the experiences with God the generation before them had, and would be in danger of hanging on to a false sense of security. Because they did not know God firsthand, questions would arise like: "Mum, why do we keep the Sabbath?" Dad, "why give tithe, why all these regulations of clean and unclean meat, why offerings, worship and praying. Why do you stick to all these principles?" Deuteronomy 6:20, 21 says: "When your son [or daughter] asks you in time to come, saying, 'What is the meaning of the testimonies, the statutes, and the judgment, which the Lord our God has commanded you?' Then you shall say to your sons…."

Let us pause here for a moment and ask ourselves, the question: **What is it they were supposed to tell the next generation?** Deuteronomy 6:21 says: "then you shall say to your son: 'We were slaves of Pharaoh in Egypt, and the Lord brought us out of Egypt with a mighty hand;'" They were to share their personal and communal experience with God. Their spiritual legacy, the accounts of their origin, their history, their destiny and their walk with God and what He meant to them. The initial sharing was to consist of first hand experience with God. No sermonizing, but sharing of the love, faithfulness and power of God in their lives. The children and young adults growing up in Canaan needed to relate and connect with parents and adults in the community, who would inspire them to walk with God, through godly living and sharing.

In this way the deep spiritual significance of practices that originated in their walk with God, would keep their significance as signpost of the Kingdom of God.

It is part of our human predicament to naturally drift away from our Creator and Savior, into idolatry. Religious practices then become an end in themselves, instead of signs pointing to Jesus.

## *God is very Serious about This*

At various stages in Israel's history this happened. Time and again the collective spiritual legacy of God's people eroded into mere ritualistic religious practices. At times they would completely lose sight of God and turn to practices we cannot begin to comprehend.

Many centuries after God revealed His blueprint to Moses, the prophet Jeremiah was called by God to confront the families and leaders, the chosen people, with an urgent message. They had turned to shocking practices. Jeremiah 19:1-7 pictures the scene:

> Thus says the Lord: "Go and get a potter's earthen flask, and take some of the elders of the priests. And go out to the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, which is by the entry of the Potsherd Gate; and proclaim there the words that I will tell you, and say, 'Hear the word of the Lord, O kings of Judah and inhabitants of Jerusalem. Thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: "Behold I will bring such a catastrophe on this place, that whoever hears of this, his ears will ring.

> Because they have forsaken Me and made this an alien place, because they have burned incense in it to other gods whom neither they, their fathers, nor the kings of Judah have known, and have filled this place with the blood of innocents (they have also built the high place of Baal, to burn their sons with fire for burnt offerings to Baal, which I did not command or speak, nor did it come to My mind), therefore behold, the days are coming," says the Lord, "that this place shall no more be called Tophet or the Valley of the Son of Hinnom, but the valley of Slaughter. And I will make void the counsel of Judah and Jerusalem in this place, and I will cause them to fall by the sword before their enemies and by the hands of those who seek their lives.

Instead of raising their kids to reach their God-given potential in connecting them to their Creator, parents were sacrificing their children to idols. In our time, we consider ourselves to be more sophisticated, cultured and developed. We frown at cultures and people who practice human sacrifice. But, could it be in our days, that children are also sacrificed to today's idols in more sophisticated ways?

The cultural context in which we live today may lead parents, in a very subtle way, to neglect the emotional and spiritual needs of children and young people. Due to economic and social challenges parents feel pressured to work hard to make ends meet. Others put a lot of energy into furthering their careers and have little time and energy left to spend with the young impressionable minds of the next generation. Neuroscience has demonstrated that young children's brains are shaped in interaction with the physical, emotional, intellectual, social and spiritual climate parents and adults create. Even during pregnancy the foundations are laid for the child's future growth. Today, children and young people are constantly bombarded with conflicting cultural values through several media, the example set by idols, and more seasoned friends at school or in the neighborhood.

Think also of the many children growing up in war zones, those who are abused, who grow up in violent neighborhoods and in poverty. Many parents are often unaware that they are responsible for laying the foundation of further development in the child's brain. This foundational shaping is an awesome and beautiful task God has given to parents. When children and young people are thoroughly exposed to God's high values of human growth and development, their minds and hearts are shielded by the power of the Holy Spirit. Yes, they may experiment as part of their development with things that cause us concern, but in their souls the seed of the Gospel has been sown. The values they receive will have an impact on their lives.

That is why Jesus expressed serious concern about how we should relate to children. In Matthew 18:6 Jesus says: "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea." This expression does not seem to fit the picture many of us have of Jesus, but He is very clear about this. He values each child. He knows first hand with whom we are dealing. The enemy goes around like a roaring lion seeking to devour children (1 Peter 5:8).

God's blueprint, revealed to Moses, applies to all cultures and neighborhoods. And like Jeremiah, we have a prophetic task to empower families to fulfill this primary task. Prophets

are initially never liked. They come across like annoying people who have a way of getting at the heart of the matter. But in the end people are better off. So today our families in our local churches and in the communities we are a part of, will be better off and blessed, when we faithfully practice God's blueprint found in Deuteronomy 6.

## *Changed Circumstances*

As we near Jesus' return, I often wonder how the great enemy is seeking to adapt his strategy. It must be very subtle. As a young boy I grew up in the sixties and early seventies, in the outskirts of the capital of Surinam, a former Dutch Colony in South America, near Brazil. The pace of life was quite relaxed for us children and we were not always aware of the long hours our parents put in to earn a living. However, every morning in the village where we lived, around six o'clock we would wake up by the songs of birds and a neighboring Adventist family having their morning devotion. As the early rays of the sun penetrated the dark night, one by one more families started singing and praying. Once a year we had the week of prayer. Five o'clock each morning the church community would gather at the church premises to worship together.

Mum would wake us up at 4:30 a.m. With a lot of protest we would go along. Around six the church community would be standing outside to welcome the new day with singing and praying. In the end it was a great experience to welcome the new day, this way. I grew up in an atmosphere where religion, spirituality and church were a major influence. On Sunday morning we had pathfinders, in the evenings evangelistic meetings, Wednesday evening prayer meeting, each Friday Youth meeting. Sabbath morning church would start at 9 a.m. and would not end until early afternoon around 1 p.m. In the afternoon after a short siesta parents would go out to share tracks. They tried to bring us along. On Sabbath afternoons we had the Missionary Volunteer program, known recently as the Adventist Youth service. On Saturday nights we had church socials and on Sunday mornings we would start all over again.

But this was not all. We also had to face the annoying aunts and uncles of the church family. They would always make us chat and ask how things were going. They were not always tactful. We would warn each other when one of them was around. When they noticed we had experimented with something that was not allowed, they would gently scold us.

Having children, I now realize how important these people were to me. They expressed in their own way that they cared and wanted to meet us in the new earth. They treated us as one of their own. They showered us with attention. They loved us. That is what children and young people are in desperate need of today, in the church as well as in the communities in which we live.

Many of today's parents grew up in a similar atmosphere where church was a major factor. Our world looks increasingly different. In many places we live in non-Christian cultures where the church community has to struggle for survival. In some places church communities are thriving. But ever-increasing globalization makes the world a village where values and cultural trends are spreading rapidly among young people. In our world children and young people do not automatically grow up with God-inspired spiritual principles. Today

many believe everyone has the right to define what is good and true for herself or himself. There are no absolute guidelines. People tend to make decisions on how they feel, not on a standard greater than themselves. The value of the individual in the family increasingly outweighs the authority God gives to parents who are responsible for guiding their children. Many teenagers today expect the freedom to set their own personal boundaries. Parents often lack the skills to guide their children.

### *Investment Time is Now*

Research shows that in an increasing number of societies alarming numbers of young people are leaving the church. In some cases about 50 percent leave the church before they reach the age of 20, which doesn't necessarily mean leaving God. This same research shows that where churches actively work with families and church schools, and actively involve children and youth in service activities and inspire them in the ways of God, about 80 percent will feel a sense of belonging. Our main purpose is to win people for eternity.

Did you know that 19 out of 20 people who eventually become committed Christians do so before they are 25 years old? After 25 years of age, only one out of 10,000 people are baptized. After 35 it is one out of 50,000. After 45 one out of 200,000. After 55, one out of 300,000, after 65 one out of 500,00 and after 75 years of age, it is only one out of 750,0000 people. In principle, by the age of 13, the basic decision has been made whether to believe in God. Therefore the biggest evangelistic effort, is investing in families where children and young people are. Working with families, children and youth is not holy babysitting compared to other ministries as some may be tempted to think. It is evangelism at the grass roots level. Ellen White has an excellent statement about this:

> Society is composed of families, and is what the heads of families make it. Out of the heart are "the issues of life"; and the heart of the community, of the church, and of the nation is the household. The wellbeing of society, the success of the church, the prosperity of the nation, depends upon home influences. (White, 1952, p. 15)

"The restoration and uplifting of humanity begins in the home. The work of parents underlies every other. Society is composed of families, and what the heads of families make it." (White, 1942, p. 349).

### *Mission Possible*

To accomplish this task we need to be filled with the love of Jesus to love families, children and youth. Based on the love of Jesus the church will increasingly become the discipleship community Jesus has in a mind. There will be a Holy Spirit inspired spiritual, emotional and intellectual climate where it is safe to be. Grace, forgiveness and biblical principles will determine the quality of our relationships. Church activities will be fun and enjoyable. The personal value of each child and young person will be recognized, and they will be involved as soon as possible. There will be room for every child to express their God-given talent. All this will be constantly seasoned by prayer for the Holy Spirit to reach their hearts. Here is the underlying principle: For anything to reach the heart, it first must enter the senses and touch the individual.

We will reach the hearts of our children and young people when we enter their developmental world and are honest with them. From the start the Adventist Church was made aware by divine guidance of this reality. From its inception the Adventist Church realized that families, children and young people need to be reached, at their developmental level where play is an important element. Jesus connected and mingled with people. He was all-inclusive. He answered their needs, and then He bade them, "follow Me!" (White, 1942, p. 143). That is the essence of it all, becoming a disciple of Jesus.

We have no time to lose. Soon the days of their playing will be over. Soon they will be gone from home and their local church. Would we have done all we could to guide them toward the Kingdom of God?

## *Conclusion*

When our boys were young and we went on holiday, we would have hardly left home when they would ask: "Daddy are we there yet?" When the road is long we need to occupy children and youth in a positive way. Their boundless energy, need for adventure, curiosity, search and questioning need to be channeled. I (Clair) usually had some toys, books with pictures, stories and something to eat during our trip. Sometimes we would stop and have a little celebration.

Someone once said the church is like a train. Traveling through time we are on our way to God's Celestial City, the New Jerusalem, our final destination. The journey seems to belong from our perspective. The compartments of the train are the different ministries of the church.

One of the many compartments is Family Ministries. Within this compartment, families and children need to celebrate the joy of salvation through music, sharing, holy feasting, celebrations and serving others as we travel through time. If we involve each individual they will not jump off the train of Salvation.

Will our children stay on the train? Will they reach the final destination? Let it not be said, "If only I had done this. If only I had done that." Let us dedicate ourselves, and make a pledge to the Lord our God (Joshua 24:24), that we will do all we can to equip, and inspire parents to personal dedication to reach their children for the Kingdom of God. Let us pray for parents, for all families and for each child in our communities. Let us commit ourselves today to work, play, and pray with children to lead them playfully to the Kingdom of God.

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# Learning to Forgive

*By Jongimpi Papu*

**Text: Genesis 50:15-21**

## *Introduction*

It is true that "forgiveness always seems so easy, when we need it, and so hard when we need to give it" (Anon). It is the people that are very close to us, those we love, that we often find difficult to forgive. Unfortunately, love does not make forgiving those who offend us any easier. It is often the wound sustained within the context of love that tends to run very deep and thus makes forgiveness very difficult. The ability to forgive, therefore, should be considered the most treasured virtue in any relationship. It is not so much the lack of love but the inability to forgive each other that has the potential to destroy good marriages. According to Matthew 6:14, 15, the ability to forgive opens the door for God to forgive us as well. When we fail to offer forgiveness we clog the channel of God's grace toward us.

As far as the Bible is concerned forgiveness is not an option but an imperative for a Christian. That is why Peter does not ask Jesus whether we should forgive but how many times we should do so. The response from Christ was rather alarming to Peter who had even stretched it to seven times. Jesus' response is that we should forgive countless times, infinitely. As long as we are hurting we should forgive. Forgiveness is thus linked to healing and to forgive should be regarded as an antidote for a broken heart. It does not only heal relationships it also brings healing to our own physical bodies. Who does not know the poisonous effect of resentment and bitterness? Douglas Weiss (2007) refers to forgiveness as a "lifestyle" (p. 157). So forgiveness is part of a healthy lifestyle.

Yes, forgiveness brings healing, but more than that, not to forgive is disobedience. It is saying no to Christ's commandment for us to forgive those who trespass against us. We know that God's commandments are for those who love Him and those who have been forgiven of their sins. God does not command us to obey and watch us struggle as we try to impress Him. He is always ready through the Holy Spirit to empower us and give us the strength to do His will.

Now that we know we should forgive each other infinitely, our only prayer should be – "teach us, O Lord, to forgive." The question is, how can we forgive the people we love, the friends we care for? How do we reach out to each other and offer our hand in forgiveness? The story of Joseph reveals different aspects to forgiveness, thereby helping us understand what the Bible teaches about forgiveness. Let us briefly examine these aspects.

### *Forgiveness is for Our Own Sake*

Joseph's brothers sent messengers to him with the following message: "… I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin…" (Genesis 50:17). This may have been the first time for Joseph's brothers to come out clearly and ask for forgiveness. But for Joseph, this was not the first time to offer forgiveness. We read the following in the previous chapters:

> I am Joseph your brother, whom you sold into Egypt. But now, do not therefore be grieved or angry with yourselves because you sold me here; for God sent me before you to preserve life… You shall dwell in the land of Goshen, and you shall be near to me, you and your children, your children's children… There I will provide for you… and your household… (Genesis 45:4-11).

Though the word "forgiveness" is not used, Joseph, without any plea from his brothers, took the initiative to forgive them. This was not done out of weakness or fear of his brothers. Remember, Joseph was the second most powerful person in Egypt. All he needed to do was to say a word and all his brothers would be dead or in prison. Joseph's brothers were not only shocked to discover that he was still alive but obviously feared for their lives as they remembered the evil they did against him. His welcoming gesture toward them was received with hesitancy and uncertainty. They were in so much shock and doubt that not a single word of appreciation came from their lips.

We read in Genesis 50:15 that Joseph's brothers entertained the idea that Joseph had pretended to forgive them for fear of their father. Now that Jacob had died, they thought they would receive their due reward for what they did to him. It is clear that Joseph's initial act was not a form of diplomacy but a genuine offer of forgiveness. He did not wait for his brothers to come groveling and asking for forgiveness before forgiving them. He took it upon himself to extend a warm hand of friendship and reconciliation.

It was primarily for his own sake that Joseph forgave his brothers. His act was not prompted by an act of confession and a plea for forgiveness, he simply offered forgiveness. The number of times Joseph wept is proof enough that this act was for his own sake, for his own healing and peace of mind. He did it in obedience to God. To hold a grudge against his brothers when God had done so much for him would be a sign of ungratefulness to God. If forgiveness is a lifestyle of the offended, as observed earlier, the offender cannot earn it.

We are not commanded to forgive those who ask for forgiveness. This is not a condition for forgiveness. We are to forgive because we have been hurt, not because we are being asked for forgiveness. Forgiveness is an attitude we display to the one who has hurt us, and not just a response to a request. In principle we should forgive even if the offender never comes

to ask for it or even to acknowledge the wrong done. Forgiveness is not so much for the offender who may or may not ask for it, but for us the offended. It sets us free and prevents us from the second hurt, which is bitterness. When we forgive we choose not to be bitter, for bitterness is a self-inflicted pain.

So forgiveness contains and limits the pain, thus preventing it from spreading like cancerous cells that will destroy the whole body. It is good for those who have done wrong to ask for forgiveness. The word used for this in the Bible is "confession." Here one admits the wrongs he or she has done without rationalizing and finding excuses. This is good for the soul even if one may not be forgiven in the process. It plays a vital role in effecting reconciliation and restoring trust. The Bible, however, does not teach us to wait for the confession of those who have hurt us before we forgive them.

Again, we forgive because we have been hurt, not because the offender has come to confess. The truth of the matter is that, the offender may never come to confess. In fact, the offender may die without getting a chance to ask for forgiveness. This is not easy. However, we have not been called to do easy things but to do impossible things, hence the need for prayer. We forgive because we can do all things through Him who strengthens us (Philippians 4:13).

### *Forgiveness is a Choice to Cancel the Debt*

It is very interesting to note that the brothers confessed their wrongs for fear that Joseph might repay them for what they did to him. What they were asking for was a cancellation of their debt; that Joseph should not collect what was due him. It was payback time but Joseph refused to collect; instead he forgave. Joseph had the power to get even, to make his brothers suffer for every ounce of pain he had suffered. It is easy to forgive those who are powerful because we still need their protection, whether physical or emotional, for survival. That explains one of the reasons why people stay in abusive relationships and continue to blame themselves for the abuse. People in such situations would rather suffer than lose the superficial sense of security and protection provided by the abusers.

The temptation Joseph faced was to use his power to get even. He resisted the temptation by choosing to forgive. Getting even does not do away with the bitterness but proves to the guilty that you are no different than they are. You are doing what they did when they had power, which in a way justifies what they did. Forgiveness then is a statement of rebuke, an unwillingness to give an excuse for the abuse of power. It is to let go of the desire to get even and embrace healing instead.

No one has the right to demand forgiveness. The offender cannot even quote the story of Joseph as a way of forcing the offended to forgive. No one deserves to be forgiven, and no one has the right to be forgiven. We ask for forgiveness since there is no excuse for what we did. Forgiveness is a choice exercised by the offended. We do it because God says so. We do it because that is the only way God can effect healing in our hearts.

Revenge and refusal to forgive creates an illusion of satisfaction. It is good to get even, but this immediately creates two problems for us. Firstly we would have to remember this when we are on the other side asking for forgiveness. We should not expect those we have

wronged to forgive us. Secondly, the same applies to God; we should live perfect lives for we cannot expect forgiveness from Him. Remember if we do not forgive others the same will be done to us. The choice is ours.

### *Forgiveness Precedes Healing*

We read from the story "And Joseph wept when they spoke to him" (Genesis 50:17). It is not very clear why Joseph wept, the Bible does not say. Remember this was the time when the servants sent by his brothers came to him and asked for forgiveness. The brothers made it very clear that they did evil to him. Could this be the reason why Joseph wept? There are several occasions where Joseph is reported to have wept. The last instance is recorded in Genesis 45:2 where it is said that Joseph wept aloud to the point that Pharaoh and his servants heard it. This was the time when Joseph made himself known to his brothers. Immediately after this public weeping, he extended his forgiveness to his brothers and promised to take care of them and their families.

It would appear, judging from the narrative, that Joseph's weeping is somehow related to his act of forgiveness. Another interesting thing is that Joseph seems to bring himself together each time after weeping. This can be seen from this text: "And he went into his chamber and wept there. Then he washed his face and came out; and he retrained himself…" (Genesis 43:30-31). There is no record of anyone comforting him. The weeping may have been part of Joseph's preparation to forgive his brothers. Getting even is designed to make those responsible for the hurt to weep but forgiveness makes those who are willing to forgive others weep. Joseph's weeping must have been a way of dealing with bitterness and anger that had bottled up within. It was a way of dealing with his painful past. Even at this time when the brothers came for forgiveness, Joseph's past wounds may have been opened but he was able to bring himself together and offer forgiveness.

The question we may ask at this point is why would Joseph weep again when we had observed that he had already forgiven his brothers even prior to them asking for forgiveness. I like how Justin and Trisha Davis (2012), in their book, *Beyond Ordinary* comment on the repetitiveness of forgiveness when they say:

> Jesus tells Peter to forgive seventy times seven not because the person we forgive will need it that many times but because resentment can have such a grip on our hearts that we need to forgive that person often for our own healing. (p. 148)

The answer then is that even though Joseph was forgiving his brothers for the second time, it felt just as painful as it did the first time. We have to forgive those who trespass against us over and over again as long as resentment and bitterness are still having a place in our hearts.

Joseph did not expect his brother to comfort him. They had caused him pain and suffering and he was not going to expect them to heal him. Joseph's healing came from God and not from his brother's confession and admission of guilt. Later on, he reminds them that they meant evil but God had a better plan. The "but" cancelled their evil deed and forgiveness paved the way for healing. What comes after the "but" is more powerful and satisfying than

the evil that preceded it. The brothers were not in charge, God was. His future was in God's hands and no one could change it.

One of the reasons we struggle to forgive is that we make those who hurt us bigger than God. They seem to have the last word on how our future should be. We are empowered to forgive others when we recognize God's control in our lives. In the book of Romans, Paul echoes the same when he says, "all things work together for good to those who love God…" (Romans 8:28).

Here is the lesson for us in any relationship; we must not expect the same person who hurt us to be the one responsible for our healing. Healing and hurt cannot emanate from the same source. It is God's power that gives us strength to offer forgiveness and continue the healing process. Joseph could comfort his brothers who were suffering under enormous guilt for he had received comfort and healing from God.

### *Forgiveness Holds the Offender Accountable*

Joseph repeated the offense of his brothers before he could reassure them of his forgiveness. He said, "But as for you, you meant evil against me; but God meant it for good…" (Genesis 50:20). Joseph's brothers knew they were guilty. They did not seek to rationalize their behavior, nor to look for excuses. What they did was evil and Joseph had the perceived right to repay them for their evil deed. It is interesting to observe that Joseph's willingness to forgive them did not downplay their evil deed. Joseph makes it clear even as he forgives them that what they did was evil.

Joseph was under no illusion, he did not suffer from brain damage, what was done to him was evil. He did not make any attempt to undermine or make their act look less serious. He found them guilty and did not blame himself for their act. This could also explain why Joseph is seen weeping on several occasions. The thought of what they did to him brought all the emotional pain. He had done no evil and as such did not deserve what was done to him. These were his brothers, how could they even think of doing such evil against their own flesh? Joseph was hurt, and the brothers were wrong. Yet he forgave them.

One of the reasons why we may find it difficult to forgive those who trespass against us is the fear of appearing to be condoning what they did to us. We fear that the cancelation of debt may actually be interpreted to mean that what they did was not serious. We often think it might be easier to forgive the person if what they did was not too bad, if they did not hurt us much. There is no point in forgiving if what was done was not too bad, if you did not suffer. We may just look at that as a simple misunderstanding and brush it aside. But when there is a deliberate plan to hurt and malicious intent to do grievous bodily or emotional harm, forgiveness becomes very expensive but necessary.

Forgiveness means letting go, but this should not be construed as "ignoring the hurt it means opening the door for healing" (Davis, 2012, p. 183). Those responsible must be found guilty and held accountable for the evil deed. This then becomes the basis for forgiveness. This is where we need to make a choice, either to forgive and set them free or not to forgive and become their slaves. It has been observed that as long as there is a prisoner there will be a

need for a guard. When you set the prisoner free you also with the same act free the guard. So it is with forgiveness, we remain slaves to those we refuse to free through forgiveness.

Forgiveness that undermines the evil done empowers the offender to repeat the evil act. This is not genuine forgiveness; it is a masked fear of rejection. We allow people to continue hurting us when we do not hold them accountable for what they did. Joseph had better things to do than to sit there brooding over what the brothers did to him in the past. There is so much to live for and time is too short. We do not want to waste it on nursing resentment and bitterness thereby putting our lives on hold.

### *Forgiveness does not mean Forgetting*

Do we forgive and forget? Clearly Joseph did not suffer from brain damage after extending his hand of forgiveness to his brothers the first time. We observe that even after the passing away of his father, Joseph still remembered what they did to him. Not only did he weep but he also made it clear that they were responsible for the evil meted against him. One reason why Joseph could not bring himself to forget what happened to him is how this was linked to God's intervention. It was through the very evil act of his brothers that God fulfilled His plans. To forget what they did would be tantamount to forgetting how God intervened for His own glory.

We all love to recite the statement by Ellen White (1923) that says, "We have nothing to fear for the future except as we shall forget how the Lord has led us…" (p. 31). It is a fact that the Lord has led us through disappointment and hurt. To forget the disappointments and hurts is to forget how He led us. Similar hurts and discouragements may confront us in the future, but we have no reason to be afraid. They too shall pass, but for us to have that attitude we must dare not forget the pain we suffered.

Our own growth can at times be traced from the moment we were hurt and disappointed by those we love. To want to forget the hurt might actually destroy the very blessing that God gave through the act. So we remember the lessons we learned through the ordeal and not so much how disadvantaged we have been by the act. Remember when resentment and bitterness creep in and a desire for revenge becomes attractive, we must forgive again, there is no limit. It is forgiveness that ultimately destroys resentment and grudge and not forgetting.

### *Forgiveness may not always lead to Reconciliation*

The question that many may be asking is whether forgiveness should lead to reconciliation or even whether forgiveness and reconciliation are synonymous. The fear that we sometimes entertain is that once the person has been forgiven, reconciliation must then ensue; that genuine forgiveness should always lead to reconciliation. In this narrative Joseph did not only forgive his brothers, he went ahead and effected reconciliation. Our tendency is to conflate forgiveness with reconciliation. Kerry and Chris Shook (2010) make a forceful point when they say; "Forgiveness is something you choose to do instantly but trust is something that takes time to rebuild" (p. 83). Reconciliation is built on trust and there is no guarantee that trust will be rebuilt after forgiveness.

Joseph was able to reconcile with his brothers as Ellen White (1958) puts it because "he had seen the fruits of true repentance" (p. 230). While forgiveness can be given without the confession of the offender, reconciliation is not possible without genuine confession and admission of wrong done. There are instances when reconciliation may not be possible. This should not be taken to mean that there is no genuine forgiveness. Rebuilding trust takes time as we have already indicated, and even with this there is no guarantee that it will take place.

There are some offences that may require a long time for one to be convinced that there is genuine repentance even though confession may have been made. But we should be careful and not find ourselves using not reconciling as a way to get even. Bitterness and resentment should not be the reason for not reconciling. Let us keep this order in mind – forgiveness leads to healing; confession and remorse may lead to reconciliation.

### *Is this Possible?*

The last question we may be tempted to ask is whether this is possible today. Yes, Joseph did it, maybe he could because he had everything. What about the one who has lost everything? A spouse somewhere who is HIV positive due to the unfaithfulness of their partner? A child whose life may never be the same again because of the abuse they suffered from their parent? What do we say to these people, how does the story of Joseph comfort them?

These are indeed challenging questions, but the common problem with all such questions is that we tend to put a full stop (period) where God has put a comma. We write off the future because of the present or the past negative experience. We often give up because we cannot see ahead of us. Joseph was incarcerated for a crime he did not commit but refused to be enslaved by resentment toward the wife of Potiphar. Joseph's life and destiny were in the hands of God not in the hands of the wicked woman. This is how the Bible reflects this stage in the life of Joseph:

> Then Joseph's master took him and put him into the prison, a place where the king's prisoners were confined. And he was there in prison. But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison. (Genesis 39:20, 21)

The same God who was with him during the time of success and joy was with him also in prison. Those who hurt us may leave us with deep scars but God will never leave us. To give up when people hurt and disappoint us is to vote against God and render Him powerless. Joseph was in prison but free to forgive and embrace healing and move forward. It was the attitude of Joseph that changed the prison environment and not the other way around.

Jesus once said to a man who had been paralyzed for thirty-eight years, "'Rise up and walk'" (Luke 5:23). We know the story – today the same Jesus is saying to those of us who have been paralyzed by resentment and bitterness for years; rise up and extend your hand of forgiveness to the one who has hurt you so much. The one who instructs you to rise and forgive is willing to give you the necessary strength and power to do so. It is healing you need today regardless of what the future holds. Today you can claim that healing as you extend your hand to God asking Him to help you do the same for the one who has hurt you. Rise up and walk to a better future.

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# Growing Disciples for Jesus

*By Claudio and Pamela Consuegra*

**Text: Matthew 28:19-20.**

**[You may tell your own story of your experience fishing or one like the following]**

4:30 a.m.

"Time to get up," Daddy would say.

It was Daddy's internal alarm clock that would awaken him during our "Speck" vacation. I'm referring, of course, to Speckled Perch. That's what folks in central Florida would call the crappie Daddy and I would fish for in the waters of Lake Beresford.

It was the favorite week of Daddy's year. The long-awaited fishing trip was the highlight of a long year of repairing cable lines for Southern Bell and running a small farm. He would rouse me from the comfort of my bed to dress for a day of "hunting slab."

It was usually mid-spring to early summer when he would book us for a week at the Hontoon Marina in DeLand, Florida. The rest of the family, Mama and three sisters, would come along but pass on the early wakeup call, instead waiting until later to join us in our fishing adventure.

By 5am, Daddy and I would be eating at his favorite restaurant for breakfast—a truckstop place I fail to remember the name of, but I can't forget that they made the best tasting grits and eggs I can remember. It was always a treat to talk to the different truckers who frequented the place.

With a full belly, Daddy and I would go back to the marina, where he would rent a slip for the Bass Tracker PF-16 he had purchased for this auspicious annual occasion. The boat would be ready the night before, being that Daddy was not one to get ready the day of. He made sure the poles were rigged, the gas tank full, and the afternoon lunch packed. We were not coming back for lunch. Lunch was a waste of time and travel according to Daddy. Also it took up too much fishing time. Many times a bologna sandwich, pack of malt crackers, and plenty of Coca Colas were the items on the menu for the lunchtime feast.

In the marina store, we bought the minnows we would need, and then walk down to the boat. At the first sign of safe light, we would set out into the St. John's River.

The early morning air would cut through my clothes like pins. I learned if I turned my back into the wind, it was a bit more bearable. What was even better was being able to sit right behind Daddy and use him as a shield against the piercing wind. I still remember smelling his Old Spice as we raced toward his favorite patch of lily pads. After fifteen minutes of shivering in the morning air, we had a minnow on a hook and were dipping into the spaces between the lily pads. Each dip brought a different anticipation of when the first strike would come.

Daddy had an uncanny knack of catching the first fish of the day. He never let on he had hooked a speck until I heard the singing of the reel on his fiberglass pole. By the time I heard his reel singing, Daddy would have the fish in the boat. I would ask him where he hooked the fish. "Over there," he would reply, without pointing or even nodding his head. I just had to open the live well and let him deposit the prize. Finding specks was my problem to figure out. Eventually, I would figure out how to find the ever-elusive prey. Just keep fishing.

We would fish that same set of lily pads at the same time every day. Just like anyplace Daddy would fish, if the specks were biting, we stayed; if they weren't, we moved to another place.

That was typically the routine for the day: keep trying and trying, until success came our way. Daddy would maneuver the boat with precise movement to avoid running over the swarm of specks we would often encounter. He would control the trolling motor with one foot, fish with one hand, drink his Coke with the other hand, and all without getting too close to the limbs of the trees on the banks of the St. Johns.

I would catch one to every three of Daddy's. Our goal was to catch the limit. Often we would come close, but I don't remember ever catching the limit. But, it was sure fun trying. We would try many techniques, and even experiment with radical ideas. But, Daddy would often stay with dipping the minnows in amongst the lily pads.

By the time darkness would start setting in, we would head back to the Hontoon Marina. According to how far we were away, Daddy would set toward the marina and get there with barely enough light to see our way back to the slip. We would unload our catch into the cooler, and clean them in the cleaning station at the end of the dock under the watchful eye of an owl. The marina manager told us if we gave him one of our fish, he would leave us alone. Daddy didn't want to give up any of our catch the first time we encountered him. Well, the first time we stepped away from the cooler, the owl swept down, flipped the lid of the cooler himself, and took off with one of our fish! Then, sure enough, he left us alone to clean our fish. After that, we would sacrifice one fish to the owl every time we went to clean our fish.

Now I live in LaGrange, Georgia. The memories of Daddy and I fishing still live while I fish in West Point Lake. The techniques are a lot different, but the effort is still the same: keep trying until you find them.

Thank you, Daddy, for the lessons you taught me and the good times we had fishing together (Hyers, n.d.).

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Some of us have gone fishing since we were young, while others have never done it even once. So much of this earth's surface is covered by water - oceans, rivers, lakes, etc. - that most of us have watched people as they try to capture fish in their nets or on their fishing hooks. Even Jesus used the image of fishing as he called some of His disciples: "And Jesus, walking by the Sea of Galilee, saw two brothers, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea; for they were fishermen. Then He said to them, 'Follow Me, and I will make you fishers of men.' They immediately left their nets and followed Him" (Matthew 4:18-20).

"I will make you fishers of men," said Jesus. The church has taken that promise of Jesus seriously and has been fishing effectively for men during the last two thousand years. As Seventh-day Adventists, we have used many methods to fish—personal Bible studies, evangelistic meetings, through the media (TV, internet, radio), the health message and many others. As a result, in just over 150 years the church has grown from a few thousand members located mainly on the Northeast United States to over 17 million members living all over the world.

## *Several Ways of Fishing*

Fishing can be done in many different ways. Probably the most common way to fish is with a fishing rod, line, hook, and some sort of bait or lure. Most of the people who fish this way aim to catch fish which they will either consume as food or sell to others for their consumption.

Another common way of fishing, which was the way it was done in Jesus' time, is with the use of a net. The advantage of this method is that the chances of catching more fish all at once is greater than with just one hook.

Some people do not intend to keep the fish they catch but rather use the "Catch and Release" way of fishing. Those who practice this form of the sport of fishing simply want the challenge of capturing the largest fish only to remove the hook and release the fish back into the water.

I'm afraid that sometimes in church we have used this method and shortly after the baptism of a person they are nearly forgotten, abandoned or even mistreated and leave the church. . . some may never return. When Jesus called His disciples to be "Fishers of men" He did not mean "Catch and consume," "Catch and let die," or "Catch and release." What He was referring to was the scope of our work. In other words, like fishing with a net covers a wider territory and usually catches more fish, so our approach should be broad and reach as many as possible.

We also need to consider that while Jesus used this image of fishing for men when He invited Peter, Andrew, James, and John, who were fishermen, for the rest of us Jesus used the image of "Disciple-makers" when He gave us His gospel commission: "'Go therefore and make disciples...'" (Matthew 28:19).

So, what does it mean to us to be "Disciple-makers?"

## *Caught or Made?*

Here are a couple of things to consider.

1. Disciples are not something we catch; disciples are made.

   There's a large industry of fishing lures. These companies specialize in the art of deception—deceiving fish into believing the movement in the water is some animal they can eat only to find themselves hooked or caught in a net, about to lose their freedom, and their life.

   We wouldn't want anyone interested in becoming a member of our church to feel like they were lured into a trap only to find themselves losing their freedom and even their life.

## *To Catch or to Grow?*

2. As Disciple-makers we are not just called to catch but to help grow disciples.

   Several traits illustrate the growth that takes place in the life of a disciple. One of those traits is *transformation*. The Apostle Paul makes a contrast in the experience of a disciple when he writes in Romans 12:2 to exhort his readers; "Do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind..." This transformation is a lifelong process of the whole person and begins with a person's reconciliation with God, an act of His grace, and results in the ultimate transformation at Christ's return.

   Another trait of discipleship is imitation. Every disciple, regardless of how ordinary or gifted they may be, is called to imitate Christ and to become like Him. Ellen White (2000) writes, "A true disciple of Christ will seek to imitate the Pattern. His love will lead to perfect obedience. He will study to do the will of God on earth, as it is done in heaven" (p.92).

   A third trait of discipleship growth is enculturation. The Merriam Webster Dictionary defines enculturation as "the process by which an individual learns the traditional content of a culture and assimilates its practices and values" (Enculturation, n.d.). This life-long process of growth involves discovery and change, of adaptation to a new lifestyle and culture, of adopting new ideas, values, and practices. Discipleship is not just taught but caught; it is something one lives, not just believes.

   From the church's point of view, we as a church must organize our ministries to help assimilate new members in order to bring them into the life of the church and keep them involved in that life so we can facilitate their growth to spiritual maturity.

   Disciple-making takes time. In the experience of Jesus and His disciples, one can see some definite phases through which He took them in the process of growth to maturity. Jesus marked these five phases with His own words:

   1. "Come and See" (John 1:35-4:46). This "come and see phase" happened during the four to five month period when He introduced a small group of disciples to Himself and His ministry, following His baptism in the Jordan River. Jesus wanted to give these men time to allow the seeds He had planted to settle in their souls so that by the time He invited them to a deeper commitment they were ready to respond.

2. "Come and Follow Me" (Matthew 4:19 and Mark 1:16-18). This phase was a ten-month period when the five, plus others, left their professions to travel with Jesus. Jesus gave them time to make solid decisions. The result in the disciples is that once the seed had sprouted in them, they immediately followed Christ as they were given an invitation, not a responsibility.

3. "Come and be with Me" (Mark 3:13-14). A period of some twenty months constituted this phase during which Jesus concentrated on the twelve disciples so they could go and preach. This period required total investment. The first thing Jesus did at the beginning of this phase was to sit them down and teach them the pillars of the believer's lifestyle in what we know as the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5-7).

4. "Remain in Me" (John 15:4-7). This phase of discipleship began with the most dramatic change the disciples underwent as Jesus prepared them for His departure and for their mission to the world. What Jesus wanted them to learn in this phase is contained in John 14-21, much of which He told them in the Upper Room. It is interesting to note that Jesus spent 49 percent of His time with the disciples, and even more time as He set His face toward Jerusalem and the cross.

5. "Go and Make Disciples" (Matthew 28:19). This final phase marks the end of the first discipleship training cycle and begins the second, this time with the disciples leading in the training of other disciples. During His ministry Jesus was the one who issued the invitation to discipleship, but after His resurrection and ascension He issued the call through His agents, the Christian missionaries. It is important to remember at this phase that Christ's commission was not simply to make converts but to make disciples, therefore the church's objective is to help new Christians progress to the point where they are fruitful, mature, and dedicated disciples.

One reason it is important to see and understand these phases of discipleship is so that we as a church will learn how to stem the loss of new members. Through this progressive method of developing disciples, Jesus teaches us how to reduce the drop-out syndrome significantly by **slowly bringing our would-be disciples to total commitment in stages**. We must be patient with new members as they grow toward maturity. We who have been in the church for many years are not perfect yet; why, then, do we expect that those who have just joined the church should be perfect?

None of us arrived at adulthood instantaneously. None of us made one giant leap from birth to youth to adult; it has taken us all years of growth and learning.

## *Stages of Growth in Discipleship*

To further remind us of this journey toward maturity as disciples, the Apostle Paul identifies three stages of growth toward maturity:

**The Newborn/Child Stage**

The Apostle Paul desired his "children" to experience the benefits of salvation and demonstrate its fruit, so he took for them the role of a mother toward her little children.

He writes, "We were very gentle among you, like a mother caring for her little children" (1 Thessalonians 2:7 NIV). The image from this verse is that of a mother who nurses and tenderly cares for her children. At this stage the mother is not concerned with correcting every mistake they make nor does she load them with a lot of information but instead is making sure they bond with her and feel secure in her love and acceptance. At this point the primary form of instruction is by example.

Besides protection and love, new disciples need the nourishment of the pure milk of the Word of God (1 Peter 2:2-3). The newborn also needs a family, they need the love of individuals in the church as well as a caring community of brothers and sisters who can "encourage one another and build each other up" (1 Thessalonians 5:11, NIV).

### *The Youth Stage*

As children grow, their parent's role and relationships toward them changes, too. In this stage while the mother wants to instill in her children the heart or the desire to grow in Christ, the father wants to equip the youth to live a life worthy of God, to live as a citizen of the kingdom ought to live. Paul also changed both his methods and his objective as he assumed the role of the father toward his children (2 Thessalonians 2:10-12).

At this stage believers need to begin to assume more of the responsibility for their own life and ministry, so Paul is encouraging, comforting, and urging them (2 Thessalonians 2:12 NIV). These three words are significant in describing what Paul, as their spiritual father, expects to be the course of action for these growing believers. The word translated to encouraging means "to call, to beseech, to urge one to pursue some course of conduct," (Vine, 1981) comforting means "to soothe, console, encourage, stimulating to the earnest discharge of duties," (p. 208) and urging means to testify through life and action the worth and effects of faith" (p. 225). So while Paul urges the new believers to live lives worthy of God, he also soothes and encourages them in their attempts. John also encourages young men "because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one" (1 John 2:14 NIV).

New believers at this point would benefit greatly from personal, one-to-one attention from older, more experienced disciples. The purpose of these times together is to equip them to fulfill the mission for which God has called them and to help them as they continue to develop the character and competence necessary to fulfill his or her calling.

Jesus understood the value and power of mentoring relationships. As Ellen White (1896) says, He sent the Twelve throughout the towns and villages so they could "help and encourage each other, counseling and praying together, each one's strength supplementing the other's weaknesses" (p.72). Jesus also understood which ones to pair together, such as John, who had a milder temperament, with Peter, who was more fiery and impulsive. It was also important that John, the younger one, be together with Peter, the older, more experienced one. There was not only balance but mutual example among the Twelve and later among the seventy (Schaller, 1978).

## *The Stage of Mature Brothers and Sisters*

Paul also related to the members of the church at Thessalonica as a brother. The new disciples have given evidence that they have indeed embraced both the message and the task, so Paul commends these brothers and sisters in the faith because they "received the word . . . welcomed it . . . as it is in truth, the word of God, which also effectively works in you who believe" (1 Thessalonians 2:13). He then goes on to commend them because they suffered persecution for the sake of the gospel but remained faithful.

Paul did not treat these people any longer as children or even youth but as siblings, his peers, equal in stature with him, and because of their maturity he now felt free to move on and leave the work to them. It is not as if he was abandoning them or would forget them; indeed, he kept in touch with him through his letters and received news about them through others, and he continued to pray for them.

## *How does a Disciple-Making Church Help new Disciples Grow to Maturity?*

An effective Disciple-making church helps to meet some of the special needs that new converts have in the process of adapting to their new church family.

A. The Need for Quickly Making Friends

Lyle Schaller's (1978) research suggests that the more friends a person has in a congregation, the less likely that person is to become inactive or leave the church. Jim Cress (2000) and Win Arn (1998) add that the number of new Christian friends a person makes during the first six months of his/her church life directly influences whether that person continues as an active member, or drops out.

At the same time, "you can't just hope people will make friends in the church; you must encourage it, plan for it, structure for it, and facilitate it" (Warren, 1995, pp. 224-225). If after six months, the new member can identify few or no close friends in the church, the chances are extremely high that the person will soon be inactive. As author Ronald Sider (2005) writes, the "friendship factor is the most important element in whether a person remains active in a local church, or drops out." That combination of food, friendship, song, prayer, and Bible study "invites and sustains many broken people along the slow, ongoing path of personal transformation" (26).

B. The Need for a Sense of Belonging

Albert Winseman (2007) writes that "belonging is far more likely to lead to believing. . . . The more engaged people feel in their congregations, the more spiritually committed they become" (p. 26). As people are led to Christ and to His church, there are times when the church members run into resistance on the part of their family members. Some of the programs and services through which congregations can help strengthen the faithful living of Christian families as well as encouraging them as they reach out in ministry to the communities may include sharing meals together, recreational or social activities, retreats and camps, family networks and support groups (Garland, 1999).

C. The Need for Nurture and Mentoring from Older Members
Former General Conference Family Ministries Directors, Ron and Karen Flowers, often write of the value of imitation and the important role of modeling in the learning process because people tend to become like who or what they watch. This principle applies to relationships generally and especially to the home, where imitation is common: children imitate their parents and siblings; married partners often imitate one another.

## *Conclusion*

During the last 150 or so years, millions have become members of the church—something for which we are very happy and praise God!

Sadly, though, during that same time many have left the church. Some may have left because they disagreed with one or several of the doctrines of the church. As sad as it is, we can't force people to believe what we believe. Others might have left for a number of personal challenges - family pressure, difficulty in adapting to the Adventist lifestyle, etc.

Our fear and concern is those people who believe as we do, who have made changes in their lifestyle, who are happy and excited to be part of the church, but who felt lonely while sitting from week to week in the midst of their new church family. Our concern is that those of us, church members, who were thrilled to see new members join our ranks, are doing nothing to embrace them and help them as they move forward in the journey of discipleship growth.

Ellen White (1986) writes:

> Those who have newly come to the faith should be patiently and tenderly dealt with, and it is the duty of the older members of the church to devise ways and means to provide help and sympathy and instruction for those who have conscientiously withdrawn from other churches for the truth's sake, and thus cut themselves off from the pastoral labor to which they have been accustomed. The church has a special responsibility laid upon her to attend to these souls who have followed the first rays of light they have received; and if the members of the church neglect this duty, they will be unfaithful to the trust that God has given them (p. 351).

Let us continue to be faithful fishers of men. Let us not simply catch and release. Instead, let us be good Disciple-makers so we can retain more of the new members who join our family and so we can see them grow to be Disciple-makers themselves.

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# Reaching Across with a Pinch of Salt

*By Barna Magyarosi*

**Text: Mark 9:33-50.**

We live in a society that is becoming more and more individualistic, selfish and in search for power, though not the power of character of course! Not the power to serve others, but power to obtain what we need. Power to satisfy our real or perceived needs. Power to get across our will no matter what.

Discussing interaction and collaboration, Steven Covey (2004) writes about four possible ways of relating to each other: win-win, win-lose, lose-win, lose-lose. Most of us were raised believing that if somebody wins, somebody else has to lose. Games, competitions and sports teach us the same. Goods and privileges in life are like a big pie from which everybody wants to grasp as big a slice as possible. However the more one gets, the less is left for others.

Growing up in a communist country, I still remember those evenings when after standing in line for 3 hours in the freezing cold to buy half a kilogram of banana, my two siblings and I were watching mother as she tried the impossible: to cut a banana in three equal parts, without creating a win-lose situation. What a different picture it would have been if we had bananas in abundance! There would have been no discussions, no strife at all. God created a world based on the principle of abundance. There are enough resources for everybody to be happy and satisfied. God created a universe which functions according to a win-win principle. However, Satan was not happy with the truth that everybody could win, and he created the sad reality of sin, which makes people happy only if others lose when they win (win-lose). He wanted to have it all, while others would lose or have less. Therefore Jesus decided to restore the original state of affairs by being willing to lose everything (lose-win). And apparently, He lost everything, if it were not for the provisions of an infinite, loving Father, who by the virtue of Jesus' sacrifice could restore everything. As a result, we are facing an enemy who, knowing that he has lost, finds his happiness in causing as much loss as possible in God's world (lose-lose). It is the attitude of a retreating army that destroys everything in its wake to satisfy its anger by causing damage and

hurt. It is the senseless rage of divorcing couples that sell their property for almost nothing, just so that if one cannot get everything, at least the other will lose also.

Jesus faced the same spirit in His disciples who despite of all the love, self-sacrifice, and unselfish care displayed in Jesus, had a hard time to assimilate the same spirit. As they were walking to Capernaum, they picked up one of their favorite discussion topics: "Who is the greatest among us?" (Mark 9:34). In our words: "Who is the winner, and who are the losers?" Of course, today we would not discuss this question so openly. We have learned to be politically correct, so we ask: "Who do you think exhibits the necessary leadership skills to become the next church elder, conference president, etc.?" "Which of the families in our church share the same living standards so we can invite them over for lunch?"

The world of the disciples was not so different in spirit from ours. The disciples were constantly exposed to the same spirit that prevails in today's society. The army of the oppressing Roman Empire gave the impression that success is obtained by sheer, brutal force. Different parties within the Jewish religion invited their followers to accede to a supremacy that comes through personal piety and religious achievements. Philosophers and teachers proclaimed the all-pervasive influence of knowledge and its power to mold the future.

In such an environment Jesus came to teach His disciples the greatness of humility, the power of interdependence, and the joy of service. But it took Him more than one attempt to succeed.

After arriving to Capernaum and confronting the disciples with their wrong attitude, he put a child in the midst of them and said: "Whoever receives one such child in my name receives me, and whoever receives me, receives not me but him who sent me" (Mark 9:37). A child is the personification of dependence on others: physical and spiritual immaturity, irresponsibility, limited understanding of reality, weakness. All in stunning contrast to what the world considered greatness and guaranty for attainment. In the parallel version of the same story Jesus says: "Truly, I say to you, unless you turn and become like children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matthew 18:3).

Strong words! However, it seems that penetrating the perception of the disciples was even harder, for, as if wanting to change the topic of the discussion and talk about something more interesting, John almost interrupts Jesus by asking: "Teacher, we saw someone casting out demons in your name, and we tried to stop him, because he was not following us" (Mark 9:38). What was the rationale of John's question: a deep concern for the success of Jesus' ministry? Most probably not. He might have had two questions in mind, both having to deal with the issue of prestige. What if he works in your name, will prove be a failure, and bring shame on us? Or what if he works in your name and his success is going to be greater than ours? John's question demonstrated that the disciples, even though they changed the subject, could not get rid of the same preoccupation concerning the most fundamental question of all: "Who is greater?"

Jesus' answer appeals to them: "Do not stop him, for no one who does a mighty work in my name will be able soon afterward to speak evil of me. For the one who is not against us is for us"(Mark 9:39–40). Then He goes on to speak about obstructing others because they do

not reach the level of performance that we envision. The Greek word repeatedly used here (skandalidzo) means "to cause someone to experience anger and/or shock because of what has been said or done; to cause someone to be offended, to offend" (Louw & Nida, 1989, 1:308-309). In other words, if your abilities, gifts, talents, aptitudes make you believe that the contribution of others with less capabilities than you is not as important as yours, it is better for you to lose them, than to lose your salvation. Don't get me wrong. God and His church need people who are rich, gifted and capable, but if those gifts become a hindrance for Him to reach His purposes, it is better without them. Jesus' words are strong, even shocking, but they drive home the truth that in His church we have to reach across to each other, to recognize our interdependence and rejoice in each other's accomplishments.

In the parallel passage, Matthew introduces at this point the parable of the lost sheep, which conveys the image of a God who is more interested in one person who admits its lost state, than in ninety-nine, who believe they are safe.

Jesus, who summarizes the essence of the matter, brings the whole discussion to a conclusion with the following words: "For everyone will be salted with fire. Salt is good, but if the salt has lost its saltiness, how will you make it salty again? Have salt in yourselves, and be at peace with one another"(Mark 9:49–50).

What does salt have to do with the whole previous discussion? What does salt have to do with peace? Indeed, in the Ancient Near East salt was a symbol of peace treaties or loyalty covenants. When in the time of Ezra the opposition leaders write a letter to King Artaxerxes to express their concern about the rebuilding of Jerusalem, they refer to their loyalty to the king by the expression "because we eat the salt of the palace and it is not fitting for us to witness the king's dishonor, therefore we send and inform the king," (Ezra 4:14). In the same frame of thought, when Abijah addresses Jeroboam, he reminds him that the kingship belongs to David by a "covenant of salt" (2 Chronicles 13:5).

Salt was used in ancient times as a preservative and therefore it became a symbol of durability. But for Israel, it should have had another significance, as expressed in the sacrifices that pointed forward to the sacrifice of Jesus. God has commanded to the Levitical priests the following: "You shall season all your grain offerings with salt. You shall not let the salt of the covenant with your God be missing from your grain offering; with all your offerings you shall offer salt" (Leviticus 2:13). Salt was the symbol of the eternal covenant of God for the salvation of the humanity. It represented the essence of Jesus' death, His spirit of unselfish sacrifice, which ultimately led to our reconciliation with the Father (2 Corinthians 5:18-19).

Peace with God and peace with others is not merely the absence of conflict, but the presence of Christ and His spirit of sacrifice. The Hebrew concept of shalom meant not only peace, but also well-being, prosperity, abundance, which is in fact all what God originally intended for His children. But in order to realize that in the church today, we need to have the mentality of abundance and the spirit of sacrifice. We need to realize that together we are stronger. We need to use more the salt of reaching across to others and seeking not only our own benefit, but also the well being of others (1 Corinthians 10:24). This is one of the ways that the spirit of God's love will be manifested among us, and people around us will learn that we are disciples of Jesus.

I have heard of a grandfather who gave his granddaughter a very strange wedding present: a sack of salt. I can imagine the curiosity of the newlyweds that turned into bewilderment when opening the wedding gifts. What could be so heavy? What is in there? What a surprise! A sack of salt! But accompanying it was a nice, handwritten letter with an apparently simple request: "Promise to hang-on together until you have consumed my wedding gift." And they did stay together not only because they were committed to a "covenant of salt," but because they learned how to overcome the challenges of every-day life with the commitment to hold on to each other.

As families in a great family, we need to commit ourselves to such a covenant of salt, the salt of Jesus' self-sacrificing spirit. Let us find both in the church and in the community around us all those whose life became tasteless and senseless, and reach across with a pinch of the salt of God's love, care and sacrifice. Have salt among you, and live in shalom!

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All Bible texts are from the English Standard Version (ESV).

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# Homes of Light: Sharing the Light

*By Pedro Iglesias*

## *Introduction*

The cruel captivity in Egypt was coming to an end. God had called Moses to lead the liberation of the Israelites, but of course Pharaoh would not let them go. The first time that Moses requested their release the response was negative. As a result, God began to send plagues over Egypt. First came the locusts. While facing the disaster, Pharaoh decided to let them go, but then recanted. God sent terrifying darkness that covered Pharaoh's land. The Bible accounts that, "…Moses stretched out his hand toward heaven, and there was thick darkness in all the land of Egypt for three days. They did not see one another; nor did anyone rise from his place for three days. But all the children of Israel had light in their dwellings," Exodus 10:22-23. What a great blessing that while there was darkness, fear, and many questions all around, in the homes of God's children there was light. Light comes from its true Source. This is an important challenge for parents today: to have their homes filled with light.

This well-known story holds many lessons for today's families. The following are some that can be discussed with the audience:

**Many families today live in the darkness of a dangerous and threatening world**. All of Egypt was in darkness. Ask them to list issues that threaten marriage and children. Some threats could include:

Increase of divorce

Youth rebellion

Secularism

Drug addiction

The rise of Satanism

Loss of Christian values

Wrongful expression of sexuality

_____

_____

_____

_____

**Families, despite the world in which they live, can have better lives**. The Israelites lived in the midst of Egypt, but were not like them. The difference between Egyptian homes and Israelite homes was God. Those who had light were those with the true God who illuminated their lives.

**God will not leave families to perish in a world of darkness**. God is willing to live with His people and give them light as He did for the Israelites. God has a message of life for children, parents, spouses and siblings. The Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy provide abundant lessons to help protect families.

**Families who live in the light are a witness to others**. Is there any chance that when all of Egypt was in darkness that the light in the Israelite homes could not be seen? Today, when everything seems so dark, we can have the assurance that the homes of God's children will shine a light that illuminates others who in turn will share this light.

## *How to Share this Light with Other Families*

**1. Priority: Ensure You Have the Light**

**The light of a home comes from heaven.**

The light that was in the Israelite homes originated from the supernatural power of God.

Today, we should ensure we have Jesus as our source of light in our homes. "Then Jesus spoke to them again, saying, 'I am the light of the world. He who follows Me shall not walk in darkness, but have the light of life'" (John 8:12).

**His presence is a priority.**

If homes were produced in a workshop and you were to make a list of essential parts for their manufacturing, what would be on the list? Some elements would be essential: bride, groom, love, wedding, a place to live, livelihood and others. However, the main ingredient to "make" a good home is the presence of Christ. Unfortunately, this vital component is often forgotten. Ellen White (1951) states that, "The first work to be done in a Christian home is to see that the Spirit of Christ abides there…" (p. 20).

The world is moving continually toward secularism, which denies the importance of the religious factor in human life. Only ideas or institutions originating from humanity are considered to be worthwhile. For the modern man with a secular mind, there is no place

for God. Religion has been taken out of schools, homes, life and its many activities.

Joshua, the great leader of Israel, was about to die. The people of God had been tempted by pagan practices. In his final appeal to his followers, he encourages them not to forget their Creator and Deliverer. He invites them to leave their foreign gods. He calls for a personal decision, "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). Joshua and his house made the best decision. They decided to be on God's side.

**Family worship ensures the presence of the Light.**

Today more than ever, Jesus is needed in the home. Ellen White (1954) expressed this when she wrote the following:

> If ever there was a time when every house should be a house of prayer, it is now. Infidelity and skepticism prevail. Iniquity abounds… And yet, in this time of fearful peril, some who profess to be Christians have no family worship. They do not honor God in the home; they do not teach their children to love and fear Him. (p. 517)

**Despite having many tasks, it is invaluable to make time for family worship:** "Fathers and mothers, however pressing your business, do not fail to gather your family around God's altar" (White, 1954, p. 530).

**Family prayer is necessary:** "Every family should rear its altar of prayer, realizing that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom" (White, 1954, p. 517).

The Bible should be studied: "Let all join in the Bible reading and learn and often repeat God's law" (White, 1954, p. 522).

**Activity**

Ask the families present to discuss the importance of ensuring Jesus' presence in the home.

Ask the parents to make a commitment to their families to work together for the Light of the world to shine from their home.

**2. Share the Light with Extended Family**

**A home full of light needs to be a blessing to other families.**

You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven (Matthew 5:14-16).

**A home full of light lives to serve Jesus.**

Jesus expressed his purpose in coming to earth by stating, "For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve…" (Mark 10:45). Homes with this spirit will serve each other with love. "Our business in this world… is to see what virtues we can teach our children and our families to possess, that they shall have an influence upon other families, and thus we can be an educating power although we never enter into the desk" (White, 1952, p. 26).

Start sharing your light with those closest: extended family.

**Activity**

Ask participants to think of an extended family member with whom they can share their faith. Ask each person or family to make a list of three activities they could do with those family members to strengthen their relationship.

1._____

2._____

3._____

Ask participants to share their ideas with others.

Make a list of the best ideas.

Some suggestions on sharing with families:

**Embrace the closeness you have with them**. Closeness with extended family should be opportunities to share Christian principles. The existing degree of trust and understanding should be embraced.

**Avoid imposing your own religious beliefs**. The church's body of doctrine is based on the Word of God. It is not shared with many religions. It contains unpopular truths, such as the doctrine of the Sabbath, which are not widely accepted despite being true. Our commitment is to preach the gospel to the entire world as Jesus commanded of us. However, this should be done with tact, prudence and patience while sharing your faith with the rest of your family. It must be a gradual process. The first step should be strengthening the bonds of love that have been established and building trust.

**Lead with personal testimony**. The closeness and confidence you have already established with them offer the opportunity to preach through your personal testimony. Of course, with this comes a greater responsibility to live according to what you believe in for your testimony to remain blameless.

**Be attentive to satisfying their needs**. Christianity calls us to love our neighbors and our relatives; therefore we must be attentive to the ever-present needs of the rest of the family. Although spiritual needs may be what is most essential, they may not be the first that should be addressed as in doing so it may weaken the trust. Helping them with love will be an effective way of reflecting God's love in their lives.

**Strive to be the "best" you can**. There is no need to say anything. The presence of Christ and His truth in the lives of the Adventist members of the family should produce fruit, which becomes a blessing to the rest of the family members.

**3. Light up Friends' Homes**

**Activity**

Ask participants to think of a family with whom they could share their faith.

Ask each person or family to make a list of 3 activities to do with them in order to strengthen their friendship.

1._____

2._____

3._____

Ask the participants to share their ideas with the others.

Create a list of the best ideas.

**Homes where blessings flow**

**Heaven's light cannot be hidden**. Adventist homes should be a channel of blessings. "No one, when he has lit a lamp, puts it in a secret place or under a basket, but on a lampstand, that those who come in may see the light," (Luke 11:33).

> If we will open our hearts and homes to the divine principles of life we shall become channels for currents of life-giving power. From our homes will flow streams of healing, bringing life and beauty and fruitfulness where now are barrenness and death. (White, 1940, p. 355)

**Family-to-Family Program**

The General Conference department of Family Ministries offers the Family-to-Family program. Use this seminar to promote implementation in the local church and inspire families to get involved. Family-to-Family is available from AdventSource at www.adventistsource.org or 402.486.8800.

**Activity**

Invite the families present to decide today to participate in the program.

Ask the families to meet together and pray for the family they chose in the previous activity.

**4. Light of the Families in the Community**

**The light of the home should illuminate everyone.**

It is said that you should share the blessing of salvation with family and friends. The responsibility also includes reaching those beyond your close circle of family and friends.

**Other inspired counsel.**

"Shine as lights in the home, brightening the path that your children must travel. As you do this, your light will shine to those without" (White, 1952, p. 37).

**Build a missionary family.**

"The children should be so educated that they will sympathize with the aged and afflicted… They should be taught to be diligent in missionary work… that they may be laborers together with God" (White, 1949, p. 62).

**Activity**

Choose in advance two or three families who have carried out a mission project.

Ask them to talk about the details of this project. For example, how they planned it, the participation of each family member and what was their impression after carrying it out.

Instruct them, if possible, to have the children tell part of their experience.

**Start with Small Missionary Projects**

It is commonly thought that performing missionary projects is limited to pastors or church elders. Some consider doing missionary work to be preaching a sermon or holding an evangelistic series aimed at baptizing people. This type of thinking discourages members and inhibits participation in the task of serving others as Jesus commanded.

**"Family Missionary Project"**

Several years ago, the General Conference department of Family Ministries distributed a pamphlet titled 101 Ideas for Family Evangelism. Included in this brochure was a list of simple and practical ideas for family missionary projects. They also offered the opportunity for children, even younger children, to participate. Below are a few of the ideas from the list:

- Plan to involve the family's various talents in a special missionary project.
- Choose a measurable and reachable project.
- Read the Bible or gospel literature to an elderly or visually impaired person.
- Visit someone who is sick.
- Do grocery shopping for a shut-in.
- Bake a loaf of bread for a homeless person.
- Pay a friendship visit to a shut-in.
- Hand out evangelistic literature.
- Sing or play musical instruments at a nursing home or retirement center.

- Go ingathering as a family.
- Hand out fliers inviting people to evangelistic meetings.
- Invite one or two of your children's friends to church and a meal on Sabbath. Provide transportation if needed.
- Invite younger family members to share toys with children of needy families.
- Host a small group in your home.
- See more ideas at family.adventist.org

**Activity**

Ask the audience to provide other ideas to the list:

_____

_____

_____

_____

**5. Your Family: Committed to Hastening the Second Coming**

Christ is coming to earth again. The task of preaching the gospel to the end of the earth is everyone's job. Adventist couples should be encouraged to raise missionary children who participate joyfully in preaching the gospel.

**Family participation**

Hundreds and thousands were seen visiting families and opening before them the word of God. Hearts were convicted by the power of the Holy Spirit, and a spirit of genuine conversion was manifest. On every side doors were thrown open to the proclamation of the truth. The world seemed to be lightened with the heavenly influence. (White, 1991, p. 65)

**A simple approach to reach everyone**

The best work you can do is to teach, to educate. Whenever you can find an opportunity to do so, sit down with some family, and let them ask questions. Then answer them patiently, humbly. Continue this work in connection with your more public efforts. Preach less, and educate more, by holding Bible-readings, and by praying with families and little companies. (White, 1915, p. 193)

**A Call to Adventist Families**

God has illuminated church families with the light of truth. This light helps to edify families in order to live with Him in heaven and the new earth. Families owe a debt of love to God and their neighbor; to share the light of salvation so that all families on earth may have the opportunity to be illuminated. May your family shine for Christ and the world.

You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. Nor do they light a lamp and put it under a basket, but on a lampstand, and it gives light to all who are in the house. Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:14-16)

Invite the families and individuals present to join together to participate in evangelism through family ministries.

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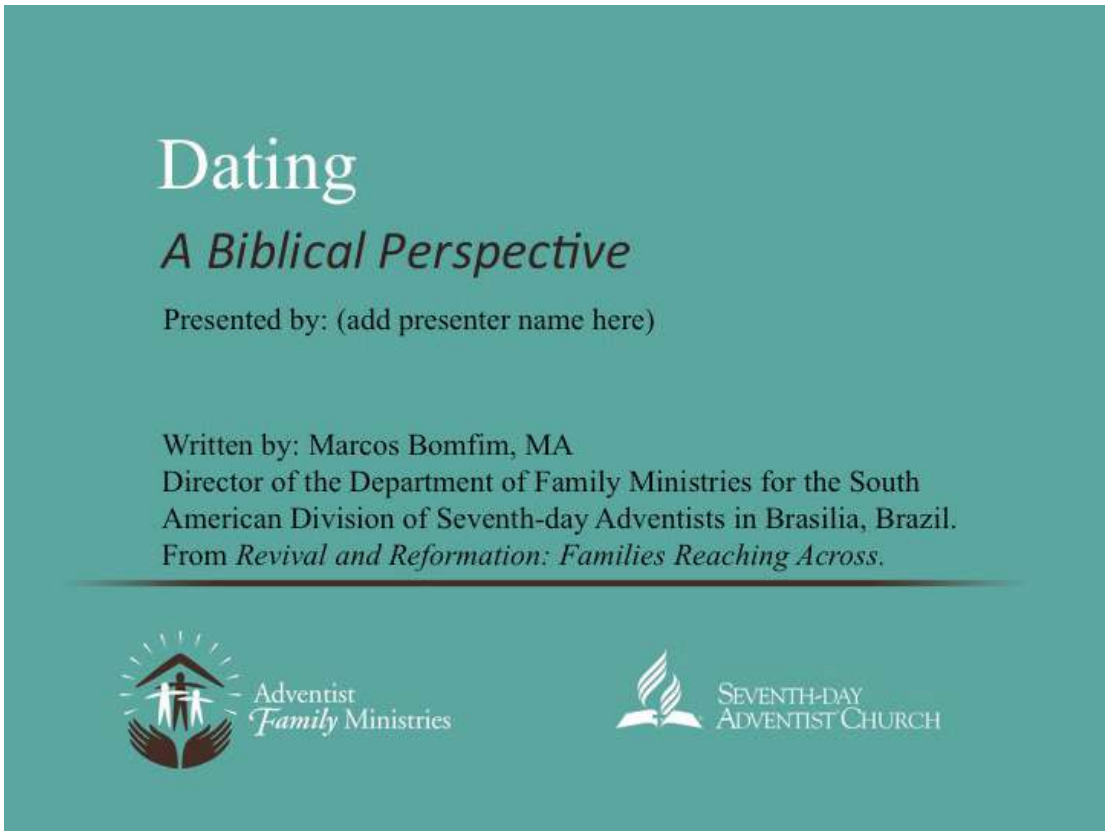
# Dating: A Biblical Perspective

*By Marcos Bomfim*

**Text: Genesis 2:18.**



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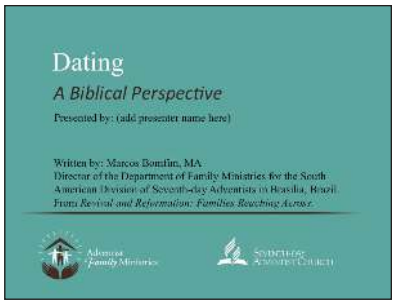



**Slide 2**

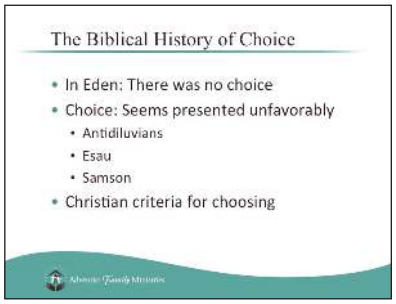
**For God's glory:** *1 Corinthians 10:31*

**Following God's will:** *1 John 2:15-17*
*Proverbs 18: 22*
*Proverbs 19:14*

**Christian dating:** *1 Peter 2:9.11*

**Additional Bible references**
**Do not be anxious:** *Philippians 4:11*
**Promise:** *Genesis 18:14*

**Slide 3**




**In Eden:** *Genesis 2:20-23*

**In the Old Testament:**

- Parents chose wives for their sons (*Genesis 21:21,24*)
- In some cases, young men could choose: Mical and Rebekah (*1 Samuel 18:20, 21; Genesis 24:57, 58*)

**Engagement was associated with the payment of dowry**

(*Genesis 34: 12; Exodus 22: 16; 1 Samuel 18: 25*)

**Choice seems presented unfavorably:**

- Antediluvians: *Genesis 6*
- Esau: *Genesis 26:34, 35*
- Samson: *Judges 14:1-3*

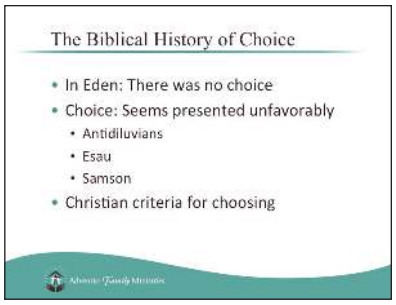
**Christian criteria for choosing:**

*Philippians 4:8*

**Additional Bible references:**

*Proverbs 16:9*
*Proverbs 17:24*

**Slide 4**



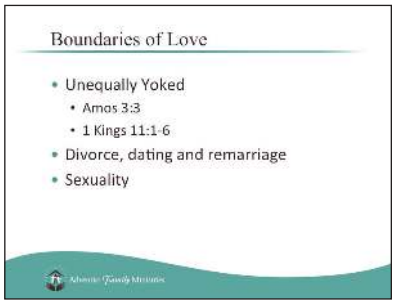

**Isaac and Rebekah:** *Genesis 24*

**A few additional narratives to mention:**

David and Abigail – wisdom
David and Bathsheba – passion
Ruth and Boaz – God's will
Joseph and Mary – the fear of the Lord kept the relationship
Jacob and (Leah) Rachel (He chose) *Genesis 29:18*

**Slide 5**

**Slide 6**




**Unequally yoked:** *Amos 3:3; Genesis 24:3; Genesis 28:1; Exodus 34:12-16; Deuteronomy 7:1-4; Joshua 23:12, 13; Numbers 25:1-3; Judges 2:2, 10; 3:6; 1 Kings 3:1-3; 11:1-6; 2 Corinthians 6:14-7:1*

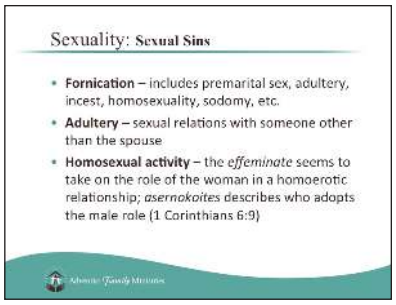
**Divorce, dating and remarriage:** *Matthew 19:9; 1 Corinthians 7:39*

**Sexuality:** We will look deeper into this during the remaining time.

**Slide 7**

**Biblical text:** *Genesis 2:24*

**Slide 8**




**There is a progression of steps:**
Therefore, (1.) a man shall leave his father and mother and (2.) be joined to his wife, and (3.) they shall become one flesh
*See also 1 Corinthians 6:16*

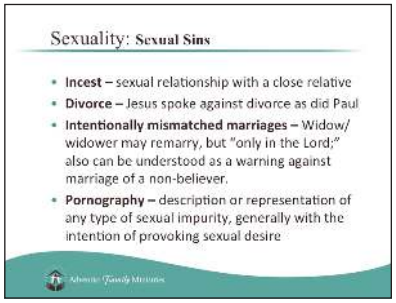
**Pure sexuality:** *Genesis 2:24*

1. Between two people
2. Real (not virtual)
3. Of different genders
4. With the lifelong commitment of marriage
5. With love
6. Respecting the bodily limits imposed by the Creator

**Additional Bible references - Promises and warnings:**
*Proverbs 16:2,3; 27:12*

**Homosexual activity:**
*See also Leveticus 18:22*
*Romans 1:26,27*

**Slide 9**




**Incest:**
*1 Corinthians 5:1,2; Leveticus 18:6-18*

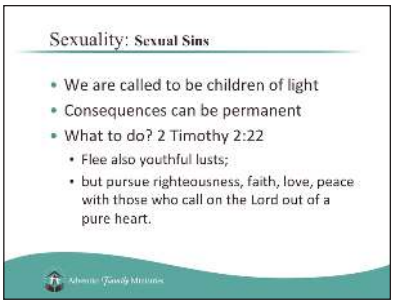
**Divorce:**
*Matthew 19:1-10; 1 Corinthians 7:10-16; Malachi 2:16*

**Intentionally mismatched marriages:**
*1 Corinthians 7: 39; 1 Corinthians 5-7; Deuteronomy 7:3; Nehemiah 13:23-25*

**Pornography:** also an improper revelation of what God intended to leave concealed;
*Genesis 3:7;*
*1 Timothy 2:9*

**Slide 10**

**Slide 11**




**Concluding passages**

*1 Corinthians 10:8* – warning

*Ephesians 5:3-5; 8-11* – not to be mentioned among us

*Thessalonians 4:3-8* – physical contact without commitment

*Hebrews 12:15-17; 13:4* – consequences can be permanent; correct context is in marriage

*Revelation 21:8; 27; 22:12, 14, 15* – death, outside clean robes

*1 Corinthians 6:9-11; 10:13* – warning and hope; strength to resist

*Galatians 5:16-22* – secret to victory

*Hebrews 4:15* – He sympathizes

**Expression of love:** *Philippians 2:4*

**Loud reading of verse on honoring and sanctifying your body:** *1 Thessalonians 4:4-5*

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# Keeping our Teens Safe from Themselves

*by Alina M. Baltazar*

## *Theme*

Parents play an important role in steering their teens away from dangerous activities such as substance use and suicide.

## *Introduction*

Parenting is the most wonderful and difficult task God has given to us. Even though teens are independent in many ways and act like they do not need us, they actually need parents during this time more than ever. It is a time when they are questioning what they have been taught by their parents, extended family, teachers and church leaders. Experimentation is a common part of the adolescent years as they form their individual identity. Even though Seventh-day Adventist beliefs teach temperance and abstinence from alcohol and substances, it still happens among our young people. What we want to do as parents is to limit that experimentation and reign in any potentially dangerous behavior that it could lead to.

The adolescent years are not only a time for experimentation, but also a time for many physical changes, social challenges of trying to “fit in” and pressure to succeed academically. Increases in hormones, accelerated physical growth, and its associated awkwardness can be an emotional challenge for some youth. Teens increasingly are drawn to their peers for approval, which can be fraught with emotional ups and downs. The high school years are also a time of increasing pressure to excel academically in order to get into the “right” college and qualify for scholarships in order to pay for increasingly expensive yet necessary college education. These multiple stressors of physical changes, social challenges, pressure to succeed, along with any other problems in their family and/or community can lead to suicidal thinking as a way to cope with the seemingly unbearable problems that can take place during these years.

With our teens pulling away from us how can we reach out to them during this potentially troubling time?

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**Small Group Activity**

Reflect on the following scenarios: What fears do these scenarios bring out in you as parents? Are there things that you can do to decrease the chance your teenagers end up in such horrible circumstances?

(1) Best friends since kindergarten, Jessica and Laura were inseparable. They experimented with makeup, dyeing each other's hair, and having fun. Years later they experimented with something else. On a night of clubbing and drinking, that experimentation and fun turned deadly while driving home. Jessica says, from prison, she will have to live with the fact she killed her best friend for the rest of her life (ABC news, 2006).

(2) Ray Brown wishes he had done more to save his bullied son Devlin. Ray knew of at least two incidents when his 13-year-old son was bullied in middle school, but he listened to his son's tearful pleas not to get involved. Devlin killed himself in his own room after a bullying incident at school at the end of a seemingly normal evening at home (Ledger-Enquirer, 2013).

(3) Jeff is a police officer in a dangerous town known for drugs and gang activity. He and his wife would ask their two teenage boys on a weekly basis if they used drugs, making them promise that they wouldn't, thinking he was doing everything he can to keep his boys safe. Jeff likes building computers. One he was re-building was quite dusty so he bought a three can pack of Dust Off. Dust Off is a can of compressed air often used to clean dust out of computers. When he went to go use it, soon after buying it, those three cans were empty. His kids admitted they had used it on their computers and for having fun. Jeff yelled at his boys for wasting money and then went out and bought a jumbo can. The next morning his wife went to wake up their fourteen-year-old son Kyle. She found him sitting up in his bed with his head leaning forward. He had the straw from the Dust Off can in his mouth and he was pale white. He had died sometime between midnight and 1 a.m. that night. Jeff was never aware of the dangers of "huffing", ingesting inhalants from household products (Rense, 2005).

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## *Summing Up*

Teenagers are in a potentially dangerous time in their lives as they start to venture outside of the nest. It is a scary time for parents, and we may feel that we do not make a difference. We can make a difference! The foundation we have laid as parents when our children were young will help tremendously with this transition. Proverbs 22:6 states it well: "Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it." Have courage to face this challenging time knowing God is on your side. Keep reaching out to your teen, even when you think they want nothing to do with you.

This resource will guide you through the steps you need to take in order to decrease the chance that your adolescent will get involved in substance use and give you the tools you need in order to prevent suicide. In addition, you will be made aware of resources that are available to help you in this journey, even when you fear all hope is gone. There will be individual and group activities to help you apply what you have learned. Also, relevant handouts will be made available that you can take home to help you remember what you have learned and so you can share with others

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**Small Group Activity**

Reflect on the three scenarios in the beginning. What may have gone wrong? Are there things the parents could have done different? What would you do to prevent these tragic outcomes? Break into groups and discuss these questions.

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## *Substance Use Rates*

Though Seventh-day Adventist youth participate in significantly less substance use, it still occurs. Here is the reality of the situation. Among the general high school student population:

- A vast majority have tried alcohol with 90% of college students binge drinking,
- Almost half of teens have used marijuana, with 25% using it in the last month,
- About a quarter have used prescription drugs not prescribed to them, and
- About 10% have used inhalants in their lifetime.

Though many of these rates have actually been decreasing in recent years, marijuana has increased slightly, mainly due to medical marijuana legalization in some states. Many of our youth have gotten the message that these substances are dangerous. Marijuana is not considered as dangerous because there is a perception that it helps sick people. We need to continue to share the message about the dangers of drugs and set a good example ourselves. Many college students still think that drinking alcohol is part of their college experience. Not only can parents teach about the dangers, but also share clear messages about our expectations regarding our teen's behavior. We will now explore how to communicate to our teens about alcohol and substance use.

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**Individual Activity**

Allow participants 1-2 minutes to think individually about the substance use statistics, then ask for volunteers to share their answer. Are the numbers higher or lower than they thought? How do the numbers make them feel?

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## *The Power of Communication*

There are three ways communication is powerful in protecting our children. First, communication is a way to stay involved in our teen's lives and to show we care about them. Knowing that we care about them and what matters to them is very important. Research has shown that parental involvement decreases teen substance use. Second, communication is also a way to educate our teens on dangers of substance use. Third, communication is necessary to clarify what behavior we expect from our children when they are away from us with peers or at school in regards to substance use.

Even though your teen may give one-syllable answers to your prodding questions, by reaching out to them you are still showing your teen you care about their life. There are certain times that are better to communicate than others. Right after school they are probably tired and need some time to recover from the stress of the day. That is when you will most likely get one-word answers. Family meals are a great way to facilitate communication. Research has found that regular family meals decrease youth substance use by around 60%. Family meals are not the time to lecture or criticize. It is a time to show interest, care and support. If you can't make a family dinner, evening times or car rides can work as well. If your teen feels cared about they will be less likely to want to disappoint you with their behavior.

There are certain ways to communicate with your teen that work better than others. Whenever your teen verbalizes complaints about anything that is also a good time to gently prod them to find out what is troubling them. Listening is a powerful part of communicating. It will help you understand your teen and for your teen to feel understood. They live in a very different world than when you were a teen. Your child is your guide into this strange new world of 24-hour social media from an adolescent perspective. Here are some general communication tips to keep in mind:

- Stop whatever you are doing and listen whenever they talk to you.
- Try to soften strong reactions.
- If you appear angry or judgmental they will tune you out.
- You may have to agree to disagree about certain subjects.
- Listen to their point of view.

By the time your child hits their teen years your child has probably already heard about the dangers of alcohol and drugs, but now they probably actually know kids who use substances, have friends who drive or drive themselves, and they may even know where to get them. It is important to reiterate your concerns about use of alcohol and drugs. Whenever you become aware of actual stories of teens who get in trouble with substances make your teen aware of them. These stories help teens know what may actually happen, though they often think it won't happen to them. There are legal issues, including jail time and fines, in regards to substance use that your teen may not be aware of. In addition, someone could get seriously injured or killed.

When you know your teen will be out socializing with friends and there may be limited adult supervision, make it very clear what your expectations are regarding their behavior. This is especially important when they go away to college. Consider establishing a written or verbal contract, especially in their use of the car. You can promise to pick them up, at any time,

if they do not feel safe driving home with someone who has been drinking or using drugs. If you become aware of risky behavior with their friends you can ground them from their friends or their use of the car.

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**Role Play Activity**

- Pair up with someone else, one taking the role of a parent and the other a teen. Remember to actively listen to the teen's concerns. Then switch roles with your partner. Practice what you would say regarding:
- Your concerns about the dangers of alcohol and drugs and why you don't want them to use them.
- What behavior you expect from them regarding substance use and what will happen if they break the rules.
- How they can resist peer pressure.

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## *Parental Monitoring*

Research has consistently found that parental monitoring is very important in reducing adolescent substance use. Monitoring your teen does not mean being with them every minute of the day. Monitoring involves knowing about your teen's schedule, what they are involved in and how they are doing in school. In addition, monitoring includes knowing who your teen's friends are and what reputation those friends have. Get to know your teen's friend's parents. That can help you get to know your kid's friends and their family better and the parents can help you with the monitoring. If your teen is close friends with someone using substances, then your child is more likely to use.

Even if you feel that your child and their friends are good kids, when youth are together unsupervised they are more likely to engage in risky behavior. If you are not available to supervise your teen and their friends, try to make arrangements with another parent, family member or family friend to provide supervision. Whenever your child goes to a school, church or community-sponsored event make sure there is appropriate adult supervision.

There is also a practical side to monitoring. Just like baby proofing the house when your children were young, you will need to teen proof your home from substances. Monitor use of substances like alcohol, over the counter drugs, prescription drugs, and household cleaning products. If you notice these substances in their room when you know they should not be there or you suddenly notice large amounts missing, talk to your teen about your concerns. You may have to keep these substances locked up if you are worried or as a preventative measure.

If teens know they will get caught, they are less likely to engage in problematic behavior, especially if they don't like what the punishment will be.

**Discussion Question**

What have you done or will you do to monitor your teen's behavior?

## *Religion*

Involvement in religion has also been found by research to decrease teen substance use involvement. Religion teaches morals and gives us a guide on how to behave. Among Seventh-day Adventist youth, the verse found in I Corinthians 6:19-20, "Or do you not know that your body is the temple of the Holy Spirit who is in you, whom you have from God, and you are not your own? For you were bought at a price; therefore glorify God in your body and in your spirit, which are God's," is often mentioned as a reason they feel the Lord does not want them to use substances. In addition, religion can also help improve self-esteem knowing they are unconditionally loved by a loving God. The church also gives youth a caring adult community where they can find positive mentors, an outlet to help others, and activities geared towards youth to help keep them busy and out of trouble.

Unfortunately, during the teen years youth often start to question their faith. There are things you can do to help them stay on the right path. Here are some practical tips:

- Keep taking them to church.
- Encourage them to get involved in the youth group and volunteer for the church.
- Have open discussions about religion and faith.
- Let their faith grow in its own way. Be patient; let the Lord work within them.
- Have family worships, pray, and read the Bible together.
- Set a good example yourself in regards to faith.
- Encourage your teen to read their Bible on their own and to pray regularly to God about their praises and problems.

**Discussion Question**

What helped your religious development during the teen years? What have you or could you do to support your teen's religious development?

## *Summing Up*

Parents do have an important role to play in protecting their teens from substance use. Communicating support, information about the dangers of substance use, and guidelines is a very important element. Monitoring your teen's behavior is just as important to their safety as when they were young. Supporting their religious involvement by setting a good example and encouraging certain positive religious behaviors are all things that parents can do to

keep their teens safe from substance use. No parents are perfect; you are bound to make mistakes. Just keep trying to show love to your teens, it makes all the difference. Do keep in mind that even if you do all of the right things, your teen may still experiment or end up in trouble. They often learn best by experience. Adjust the plan as needed and know the Lord is watching over his children. For Jesus states in Luke 12:6-7, "Are not five sparrows sold for two copper coins? And not one of them is forgotten before God. But the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Do not fear therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows."

## *Suicide*

Suicide strikes fear in the hearts of many parents of teens. You hear the stories about youth killing themselves because they were bullied, couldn't handle the breakup of a relationship, or their depression overwhelmed them and they saw no way out. These fears are legitimate. Suicide is the third leading cause of death among teenagers and the second leading cause of death among college aged students in the U.S. and many developed countries. For every suicide there are 20 more suicide attempts that can eventually be completed or cause permanent damage. In fact, these rates have been increasing in recent years. There are youth who are more at risk than others (World Health Organization, 2003).

## *Risk Factors*

Below are known risk factors for suicide:

- Family history of suicide
- Depression
- Low self-esteem
- Substance use, many substances lower inhibition and a teen may kill themselves while high or drunk when they normally wouldn't.
- Impulsiveness, they may not realize the long-term consequences of their actions.
- Females are more likely to attempt as a cry for help; males are more likely to succeed because they are more likely to use guns.
- Anxious attachment to parents – linked to neglect and abuse by parents
- Being sexually abused can be an emotional challenge to many youth
- Lack of supportive friends to provide encouragement during difficult times
- Overwhelming loss or stress where they feel they cannot cope
- Access to a firearm or lethal means where they can actually follow through on plans to commit suicide, especially when they are high on drugs or drunk

## *Bullying*

There have been many stories of late where youth end their life as a result of being bullied. With youth being drawn into 24-hour social media the bullying doesn't end when the school bell rings; it can continue on through the night and grows like wildfire. How can we protect our children? Much of the negative interactions between students our children can handle and we should let them develop those interpersonal skills. When bullying gets mean and vindictive or your child is being repeatedly victimized, adults need to step in.

Schools have set up bully prevention policies. Check with your child's school to see what their policy is and make recommendations if you think those policies are lacking. If you are concerned about a situation with your teen approach your child's teacher who may be aware of what is going on, if you feel that does not lead to a satisfying outcome, or if it is serious then approach the principal. You may even need to get the police involved if the bullying is in the form of an assault. Bullies have often been bullied themselves, have underlying emotional issues, and/or have problems at home so they need intervention.

### *Warning Signs*

Listing warning signs is a common tool for those who want to know how to prevent suicide. Remember, not all suicidal youth will show any of these signs or they may be so subtle they won't be noticed.

- Talking about suicide or death in general
- Giving hints they may not want to be around anymore
- Talking about feeling hopeless or feeling guilty about something
- Isolating themselves away from friends and family
- Writing poems, songs, or letters about loss, death, or separation
- Giving away treasured possessions
- Losing the desire to participate in favorite activities
- Having trouble concentrating or thinking clearly
- Changes in eating or sleeping habits
- Engaging in risk-taking behaviors – they don't care if they live or die
- Losing interest in school or sports

There are many reasons why youth may have some of these symptoms. That is why communication is so important. Many of these symptoms are a sign of depression. Professional help is available if you are concerned. There are resources; you are not alone.

### *Communication*

When you know what the risk factors are and what to watch for, you can then realize there is something that can be done about them. It is not a lost cause. If your teen has any of these risk factors it is all the more important to talk to them about suicide. Sometimes suicide can be like the elephant in the room no one wants to talk about. Sometimes parents think by talking about it will magically make it happen; nothing is farther from the truth. Talking to your teen about suicide is similar in talking to them about substance use. Here are some general tips:

- Choose the right time when they are more likely to pay attention.
- Think ahead of time about what you will say.
- Be honest with their questions, especially if there were family or friends who committed suicide. It is better for them to know the facts than to use their imagination.
- Ask for your child's response. They may not respond right away, but keep the door open.
- Listen to what they have to say. If you are open in your approach they may share more with you.

- Don't overreact or under react. You don't want to scare them off or act like you don't care.
- Revisit the topic as needed. You can't just give them the talk once and think you are done with it. They will continue to struggle with emotions for many years throughout their teen and young adult years.

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**Role Play Activity**

Similar to the role-play about substance use, practice what you would say to your teen about suicide then switch roles. What circumstance might prompt you to talk to your teen about this topic?

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## *Coping*

Experts believe part of the reason suicide has increased over the last years, is the increasing lack of the ability to cope with the elevated stresses put upon our youth. We as parents try to protect our children from the stresses of life and want to give them the very best to help them thrive. Unfortunately, if children are not faced with difficulties they are less likely to develop the skills to cope with problems that will inevitably arise. Here is where parents come in. There are ways parents can help improve their teen's coping skills.

Be supportive and understanding of your teen. Showing your teen the benefits of reaching out to someone when they are discouraged will most likely motivate them to do so when they are experiencing personal problems.

Encourage your teen to be physically active. Physical activity releases endorphins that lead to positive feelings. Being physically fit also helps increase self-esteem. It can be as simple as playing catch, walking the dog or going for a bike ride. Look for ways to incorporate physical activity, especially if it can be done as a family.

Encourage social activity. Isolation only makes depression worse. Even if they do not feel like going out, encourage them to do so. They will feel better going out than staying in. Offer to take your teen out with some friends to an activity you know they are more likely to enjoy.

Allow them to suffer the consequences of their own actions. Don't shield them from everything. It is better for them to get suspended now than to get arrested for a felony in the future.

Educate yourself about depression and suicide. You can then educate your teens to help them understand their feelings and how best to cope with them.

Be a good example of healthy coping yourself. Showing them how you cope with life's ups and downs can give them a guide to possibly follow.

Link them with professional help as needed and stay involved in their treatment.

## *The Health Message*

Ellen White's health message still applies today in helping our youth get through this time in their lives. Today's researchers support the inspired messages Mrs. White received over 100 years ago, which included getting plenty of:

- Exercise
- Sleep
- Water
- A healthy diet
- Avoiding smoking, caffeine and other toxic substances
- Positive thinking helps the mind and body stay strong.

"Anything that lessens physical strength enfeebles the mind and makes it less capable of discriminating between right and wrong. We become less capable of choosing the good and have less strength of will to do that which we know to be right" (2003, p. 346).

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**Individual Activity**

Have the group think about what they do to cope with life's stresses for a few minutes. Have some volunteers share with the class.

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## *Safety*

Similar to monitoring in regards to substance use, there are things you can do to improve your child's safety, especially if you are concerned about suicidal tendencies. Remember, you do not have to do this on your own. Because firearms are the most common and lethal means of suicide they should be locked up or even better yet, get them out of the house. Make sure wherever your teen goes they do not have easy access to one either. Any other substances that are potentially lethal should be locked up also.

Razor blades are commonly used to slit wrists. Those should be discarded or locked up. Many youth cut themselves as a way to cope with overwhelming feelings, not necessarily wanting to die. This inability to cope with feelings could eventually lead to a suicide attempt. If you find your teen is self-mutilating, they need professional help in order to find other ways to cope besides cutting themselves.

In general, when you are concerned about your teen you should keep an eye on them. Check the text messages on their phone, their Facebook accounts or other social media outlets, and talk to their friends and teachers. These can give you hints to what is going on. It may save a life.

You do not have to do it alone. Reach out to a mental health professional for assistance. Most health insurances provide mental health coverage. Check with your insurance carrier for preferred providers. Typically insurance approves licensed mental health counselors, licensed psychologists, or licensed clinical social workers. Make sure they have a specialty

in working with teens. Try to find one your child is able to connect with. Sometimes it takes time for a teen to open up. The counselor may want to involve the family as part of the counseling. If your teen needs medication, their counselor or medical doctor may refer them to a psychiatrist who specializes in working with children and adolescents. Medication may be necessary, especially for moderate to severe depression.

If you believe your teen is a danger to themselves or others you can have them placed in an in-patient psychiatric facility for teens, for their safety. If they have a psychiatrist, you can make arrangements with them for admission. Depending on what state you live in you can take your child directly to your local in-patient psychiatric hospital that takes teens, if you can't do that then take your teen to the local emergency room where the doctor will rule out other causes for their behavior and determine if hospitalization is necessary and where they can be placed. If your teen does not cooperate you can sign them in against their will, and if they refuse to go with you then you can call 911 in an emergency. The police and an ambulance will typically come to take your teen to the local hospital safely. Insurance typically pays for this type of hospitalization. If you do not have insurance, state aid may be available if the hospitalization has been approved by your local community mental health agency as part of the admission process.

## *Summary*

Though these topics and their relevant statistics can be overwhelming and scary, have heart that your teen will most likely get through this time just fine. Most children thrive during their teen years and it can be an exciting time of growth and self-discovery. Someday you will look back at these times and have positive memories. This can be a difficult time for parents, but you can get through it with support from others and God. Most parents' life satisfaction goes up when their teen leaves the nest, so it does get better. Enjoy the young man or woman your teen is becoming and relish in this opportunity to have such a powerful impact.

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## *Resources Handout*

**Substance Use**

National Institute on Drug Abuse http://www.drugabuse.gov/. This website provides update to date research and general information about substance use. There is also specific information to educate teens.

**Substance Abuse and Mental Health Treatment**

Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration http://www.samhsa.gov/treatment/. This website provides links to find substance abuse treatment centers and mental health treatment as well.

**Suicide**

The Society for the Prevention of Teen Suicide http://www.sptsusa.org/. This is a site that helps you learn more about youth suicide prevention.

**Bullying**

Stop Bullying Now http://www.stopbullying.gov/. This site is put maintained by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. It has information and resources on various topics related to bullying.

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## *Handout 1*
## *Communication Tips with Teens*

- Wait for the right time to talk, evenings, or car rides are good, but it will vary.

- Have open and enjoyable conversations over family meals.

- Stop whatever you are doing and listen whenever they talk to you.

- Actively listen, unconditionally, don't give unsolicited advice unless necessary.

- Ask questions as appropriate to help you understand your teen.

- Try to soften strong reactions. If you appear angry or judgmental they will tune you out.

- Listen to their point of view.

- You may have to agree to disagree about certain subjects.

- Give them some space and independence as appropriate. It shows you have confidence in their abilities.

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## *Handout 2*
## *Suicide Risk Factors*

- Family history of suicide
- Depression
- Low self-esteem
- Substance use. Many substances lower inhibition and a teen may kill themselves when high or drunk when they normally wouldn't.
- Impulsiveness. They may not realize the long-term consequences of their actions.
- Females are more likely to attempt as a cry for help; males are more likely to succeed because are more likely to use guns.
- Anxious attachment to parents – linked to neglect and abuse by parents
- Being sexually abused can be an emotional challenge to many youth.
- Lack of supportive friends to provide encouragement during difficult times.
- Overwhelming loss or stress where they feel they cannot cope.
- Access to a firearm or lethal means where they can actually follow through on plans to commit suicide, especially when they are high on drugs or drunk.

## *Suicide Warning Signs*

- Talking about suicide or death in general
- Giving hints they may not want to be around anymore
- Talking about feeling hopeless or feeling guilty about something
- Isolating themselves away from friends and family
- Writing poems, songs, or letters about loss, death, or separation
- Giving away treasured possessions
- Losing the desire to participate in favorite activities
- Having trouble concentrating or thinking clearly
- Changes in eating or sleeping habits
- Engaging in risk-taking behaviors – not caring if they live or die
- Losing interest in school or sports

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## *Handout 3*
## *Coping Tools*

- Be supportive and understanding of your teen
- Encourage your teen to be physically active
- Get plenty of sleep
- Learn relaxation/meditation skills
- Prayer
- Water
- Eat a healthy diet
- Encourage positive, rational thinking
- Encourage social activity
- Avoid smoking, caffeine and other substances to cope
- Developing a hobby can be an emotional outlet, a way to develop skills and increase self-esteem
- Support positive friendships
- Encourage their spirituality
- Be a good example of healthy coping yourself

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# Parenting All God's Children

*By Denise Dunzweiler*

## *Theme*

It is our privilege, and our responsibility, to minister to our children, with and without disabilities, within our family units, and within our church. Parents, family members, extended family and churches are challenged daily with caring for the differing needs of ALL our children. Research and statistics demonstrate that more children with disabilities are born into more families than ever before. How are Christian parents to meet this challenge? What does Scripture tell us? What does the Spirit of Prophecy tell us? What does the current literature tell us about how to care for all our special children?

## *Introduction*

Current data suggests that about 1 in 88 children have been identified with an autism spectrum disorder (ASD) (CDC MMWR, 2012). Other research tells us that more than 15.04% of school-age kids had a developmental disability in 2006-08, up from 12.84% in 1997-99 according to a study released in the 2011 *Pediatrics*. The research documented that *developmental disabilities are common, and were reported in 1 in 6 children in the United States*. The number of children with select developmental disabilities (autism, attention deficit hyperactivity disorder and other developmental delays) has increased. How do Christian parents and churches love and support this increase of families with children who have special needs?

## *Activity/Icebreaker*

Facilitator places four printouts around the room. These printouts may have percentages on them such as 5%, 30%, 70% and 100%, or pictures such as a desert, a waterfall, mountains with snowcaps and a meadow in the spring. The facilitator asks the group to look around the room. "There are four _____ (pictures… percentages…). Choose the one that best represents what you know about: parenting children with disabilities. Without talking, go to that picture. You have 4 minutes to look at each picture and decide." Once in groups, the facilitator tells the groups that they have about 5 to 15 minutes to discuss why they chose that picture. The facilitator picks one person from each group to tell the room why that group chose that picture, then asks everyone to take a seat.

## *Part I*
## *Welcome to the Family!*

The statistics given earlier can seem overwhelming, especially if you have a family member with disabilities. However, you are not alone. And, there is continuing research to help you facilitate the best life for you and all your family members. As a parent of a child with disabilities, you surely have experienced the range of emotions including great happiness, and tremendous sorrow, often in the same day, or even the same hour!

Most parents' first reactions to having a child with special needs are anger, blame, and denial, followed closely by grief, anxiety, fear, guilt, shame and depression.

There is an awakening, an acknowledgement that your child has been identified with disabilities, which can be very rude. The exciting time every parent dreams of becomes the reality of being preoccupied with things never expected, such as the ongoing barrage of medical appointments with new specialists, various types of surgeries, pre- and post-op medications, learning medical and special education jargon, dealing with continuing mental and physical tests and assessments, along with their outcomes, and the uncertainty of what happens next with your sweet child. All this can be very un-nerving, to say the least.

There is hope. As all of these feelings are shared and validated with supportive people, eventually they do give rise to hope. It is important for parents and families to be realistic about their situation, free themselves of grief and guilt, get assistance and education, and most of all, trust God to help.

"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" (Isaiah 41:10).

> Parents, gather the rays of divine light which are shining upon your pathway. Walk in the light as Christ is in the light. As you take up the work of saving your children and maintaining your position on the highway of holiness, the most provoking trials will come. But do not lose your hold. Cling to Jesus. He says, 'Let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace with me.' Difficulties will arise. You will meet with obstacles. Look constantly to Jesus. When an emergency arises, ask, 'Lord, what shall I do now?' … He will help you to use the talent of speech in such a Christ like way that the precious attributes of patience, comfort, and love will be brought into the home… Be… ministers of grace to your children. (White, 2004, p. 205)

### *Activity*

Reflect on the struggles this new family must deal with. As a friend, a pastor, a relative, a co-worker, a church member, or as a parent of a child with disabilities, discuss ways you might show your love and support to this family. Be specific.

*Seth is our only child. We waited anxiously for the nine months to pass to love and enjoy this new child. Great dreams were discussed, school, college, everything pointing to a new*

*generation in our family. Then, the day came. We all rushed to the hospital and after several hours of pain and frustration, it was decided that the child needed to be born via C-section. After the birth, and with grave concern, the doctor told us that our child was born jaundiced, and not breathing. He was rushed to another hospital where there was a neo-natal intensive care unit where he could get the help he needed. After several weeks in the neo-natal unit, he was healthy enough to bring home. His lung had collapsed and he had special medication for seizures. He would live, but we did not know the extent of his birth injuries until months, and even years, later. What we expected would be the most wonderful day of our lives, turned into a nightmare. We felt lost, alone, depressed and angry. No one we knew had ever had an experience like this; in fact, we had never known anyone with any kind of disability. We became sad, and felt guilty wondering what we did wrong to "deserve" this child. We did not disengage the church; however, we wondered where God was in all of this.*

## *Part II*
## *Spiritually Parenting ALL Your Children*

A great deal has been written for parents of children with disabilities on how to parent their special child. Adversely, little has been written for Christian parents of children with disabilities. Does spiritual parenting for children without disabilities differ from spiritual parenting for children with disabilities? The response to this question is yes *and* no.

It is not different because Christian parents want all their children to know Jesus. As a spiritually active parent, most of the time your children will learn from you as they see you grow and develop in your walk with Jesus. Many children learn to behave, and develop relationships, by generalizing what they see and have been taught. Generalization takes place when children learn something in one setting, like praying before eating breakfast, and almost automatically practice it in many other settings - before lunch, dinner, and at other times. They generalize, or practice what they are taught, often without any prompting and rather quickly.

It is different because the child with special needs will not typically generalize what they learn from one setting to another. Indeed, it takes a great deal of help to get these children to understand what is being taught, like praying before breakfast, in the first place. In other words, parents of children with special needs ought to be very explicit and plan how, when, where and how often they will shape their child's behavior, for example, when praying before a meal. Additionally, these parents will also need to assist the child with special needs in developing an understanding of prayer and a relationship with Jesus. Something, like praying before a meal, that may seem easily understood by most children, will not come as easily to your child with disabilities. Spiritually parenting your child with special needs will take a great deal of thought, modeling and prayer.

There is a wonderful book titled *Keeping the Faith, A Guidebook for Spiritual Parenting*. As with most books written for the "regular parent" (who differs from the "exceptional parent"), in order to be used with children with disabilities, this book needs to add a variety of strategies and developmentally appropriate activities.

Books such as *Ten Christian Values Every Kid Should Know,* and *Parenting with Scripture: A Topical Guide for Teachable Moments* should also be adapted by suggesting more strategies and examples of developmentally appropriate activities.

Another book, *Parenting by the Spirit: Yes, You Can be the Parent God Designed You to be* gives special attention to single parents. This book is included because as reported in the Vanderbilt University Medical Center's Weekly Newspaper, published Jan. 11, 2008, "divorce rates were 10.8 percent in the population group with non-disabled children, and 11.25 percent for families of children with various types of congenital birth defects." It is important to remember, include, pray for, love and assist the many single Christian parents who are challenged by spiritually parenting their child with disabilities without a spouse.

When it comes to exceptional spiritual parenting, two books come to mind as a gateway for families and churches to use for helping children with disabilities to know their Lord. One is

*Special Needs Special Ministry for Children's Ministry*, and the other is *Special Needs Smart Pages* – both of these books are beautifully written by Joni Eareckson Tada.

Many people have heard of this courageous woman who became almost completely physically disabled as a teenager. Her life has been portrayed in a book and a movie. Her disabilities have not stopped her pursuit of God, as she continues to sing, paint, write, council, and minister to people of all ages and abilities.

### *Activity*

Read the following and individually write what you think would be the best response to this child and his mother, from one of the following points of view: the church pastor, church secretary, church member, Sabbath School teacher or leader. When you are done writing, get together in groups of four and share your ideas.

*As Seth grew, his disabilities changed. He was medically and educationally identified with severe learning disabilities, his language was extremely limited, and his eyes were beginning to cross, so vision was becoming an issue. As often happens in families with children with disabilities, his mother and father grew farther and farther apart, until they got a divorce when he was five. Seth's grandparents became a huge part of his life – especially his grandfather when his father left. His mother wanted to continue to be a part of the church; however, as a single parent of a child with disabilities, she felt that there was not a place for her and her son in the church. As church became more and more uncomfortable to attend, they attended less and less, until they stopped going to church. No one called on them when they quit going to church. However, she still wanted her son to understand who Jesus was; and she desperately needed Christian friends. When she and her son visited Adventist churches she was asked what grade her child was in, but he was in ungraded special education classes. It was difficult, at best, for him to go into an age-appropriate Sabbath School class because he couldn't do most of the things the other children could do in Sabbath School. He had difficulty coloring inside the lines, cutting on the lines, reading or writing, and memorizing/repeating memory verses. Consequently, she taught her son at home using themed movies and music (Christian cartoons and sing-alongs), colorful books, coloring books, Bible character toys, and anything she could find that she could use to teach her son about Jesus. They continued to grow up in Christ, but not in the Seventh-day Adventist church.*

## *Part III*
## *Advocacy, Mandates, Laws:*
## *What about a Seventh-day Adventist Education?*

It is important for Christian parents of children with disabilities to learn all they can about state and federal laws that assure "a free, appropriate public education for all children with disabilities" (Public Law 94-142/IDEA/EHA). There are many laws in the United States that assist parents in advocating for their children. A place to start with the basics can be found in an article, written in 2010, by Laurie McGarry Klose, Ph.D., titled *Special Education: A Basic Guide for Parents*. There are also many websites that can assist parents in understanding their rights and the rights of their special needs children. One such website is http://www.understandingspecialeducation.com/

Most parents are the best advocates for their children. An advocate is someone who argues in favor of something like a cause or idea. To be an advocate for your child with disabilities means that you will actively support fulfilling your child's special needs – in school, in church, at summer camp, on the playground – everywhere.

Seventh-day Adventist parents who would like their child educated in a Seventh-day Adventist school now have the opportunity to ask about a North American Division program called REACH – Reaching to Educate All Children for Heaven. This wonderful teacher resource is also available for parents to use with teachers or at home. You can find it online at http://circle.adventist.org/browse/resource.phtml?leaf=8127

The driving force of the Inclusion Commission, when the resource was originally written, and again in the new 2011 edition, is "…the belief that every student can experience success." The North American Division philosophy, as stated in REACH, continues to be:

> The ultimate purpose of Seventh-day Adventist education is to teach students to love and serve God and others. All instruction and learning must be directed toward this goal. This can be best achieved by a proactive K-12 strategic plan, motivated by an inclusive spirit of accommodation, modification, and support intended to meet the needs of all students. Students desiring a Seventh-day Adventist education deserve this opportunity. It is expected that teachers, supported by parents, pastors, church members, and administrators, with Divine guidance, will make every effort to meet the students' physical, intellectual, social, and spiritual needs. This is consistent with the ministry of Jesus and the ideals of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

In *Testimonies for the Church, Vol 3*, Ellen White (1948) states, "I saw that it is in the providence of God that widows and orphans, the blind, the deaf, the lame, and persons afflicted in a variety of ways, have been placed in close Christian relationship to His church; it is to prove His people and develop their true character. Angels of God are watching to see how we treat these persons who need our sympathy, love, and disinterested benevolence. This is God's test of our character" (pp. 511-512). How are you as a church member, pastor, friend, or parent demonstrating your God-given character?

Additionally, we are reminded in 2nd Corinthians 12:9, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." It is not us, but Christ who makes us strong, His strength is revealed in our weakest and most challenging moments.

While we are parenting and educating all God's children, we need to contemplate the admonition of Christ in Luke.

> Jesus didn't stop with the simple invitation of Luke 14:21; His imperative has specific urgency. He commanded His servants to "compel them to come in" (verse 23). Given those words, how can we afford to deny any student an education that feeds the soul as well as the mind. We have no excuse for not providing an appropriate Christian education for our children, including those with disabilities. Christian schools, above all others, should be known for their support of all students. When a teacher individualizes learning to every child's ability level and style of learning, then there are no disabilities—just gifts, talents, "smarts," to be nurtured and developed to their fullest. That is our challenge as Christian Educators (Tucker, 2001, pp309-325).

### *Activity*

In groups of two (you and your spouse, or a friend), discuss how you, as a parent of a child with disabilities, would deal with your school-age child who has been identified with disabilities. What steps would you take to get your child involved with the church and Sabbath School, enroll him in a Seventh-day Adventist school, and keep your personal and family spiritual life alive and vibrant?

*As Seth's needs changed, his mother discovered that there was a great deal of help to be found in support services from the state. This was good news and bad news. The good news was all the wonderful services the state had to offer new parents of a child with disabilities. She was introduced to many types of specialists. Behavior specialists taught her how to help Seth get his behavior under control. Special education teachers taught his mother as much (maybe more) as they taught Seth. Physical therapists and doctors were able to give excellent education on how to work with her "special needs" child. However, the bad news was that specialists from all around the state told her, as he was continually "diagnosed" with various developmental delays, that he would never hold a job, never be able to cross the street alone, never read or write… the list went on and on. He was only four years old! This was beyond heart breaking. The challenge of raising a child with these types of disabilities was dread-filled, as his mother still felt very alone, and continued to question God over and over. To make matters worse, there was no spiritual guidance, no pastor, no church, and no church school where he and his mother were welcomed with open arms. Seth and his mother went from Seventh-day Adventist school to school, searching for an inclusive Christian education for Seth. It was not to be found. Each Adventist school stipulated that she would need to take Seth to the "public school down the street to get the education Seth needed." No one ever responded to the fact that his mother wanted Seth to have an inclusive Christian, Seventh-day Adventist education, and friends. Seth and his mother floundered with their faith, and church. Why? Where was the church and school support system for a single mother of a child with disabilities, and where was God?*

## *Part IV*
## *The Continuing Story*

What's next? How can you best relate to Christian parents of a child with disabilities in order to help their family overcome the challenges and relish the joys of parenting a child who has disabilities? If you are a church member, pastor, friend, or teacher, how might you be able to show Christ through your actions in an inclusive Adventist setting to this family?

*Seth learned all he could in non-Adventist schools (as he was refused admittance due to his disabilities), and from his mother at home. They continued to visit churches off and on. When he was 12 years old, he insisted on attending a bible land series at a local Adventist church, where after several weeks of attendance, he was given a beautiful notebook of the pictures of the series, and chose to walk down to the front of the crowd to accept Christ and be baptized, much to the tearful amazement of his mother. This small, local Adventist church had a very inclusive pastor who brought both Seth and his mother back into the Faith. His story has not ended. He has been the reason for his mothers' continued education and advocacy for people with disabilities within the Seventh-day Adventist church. He and his mother have continued to be passionate members of the church, and passionate about their love for people and Christ. Seth has grown into a handsome, sweet, hard working young man. Although Seth never was given the opportunity to attend a Seventh-day Adventist church school, his mother continues to work toward the day that ALL children, with and without disabilities, who want an Adventist education, will be gladly invited to participate in a truly inclusive Christian educational system.*

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# Becoming Single Again

*By Alanzo Smith*

Most people who get married take a vow that says, “Until death do us part.” However, according to some studies, these vows rarely last. The joys of wedding bliss frequently plunge precipitously into the woes of divorce court. The United States has the highest divorce rate in the world. Half of all marriages end in divorce, as do two-thirds of all second marriages (Bart, 1998). The emotional distress of experiencing a divorce is both profound and long lasting and impacts not only the divorcing couple but other family members, friends, the church and society as well.

Many theorists have likened the termination of the nuclear family unit to a death; some even say it is worse than death. For with death there is a funeral, there are flowers, words of sympathy, hugs, talk of happy memories. Friends and families come together and they grieve with the survivor. In a divorce, one mourns alone. Forrest (1981) describes her emotional pain right after she became single again:

> Dusk was drifting down as I unlocked the front door and let myself into the living room of what had been our home. I stood, holding my suitcase, trying to comprehend what had happened. This house in which I was now standing, my home, was to be sold. Where would I go? There were no relatives to take me in. I had lost my own family through a divorce. Looking down at the suitcase I had taken to the hospital three weeks ago, I shook my head as if trying to awaken from a bad dream. This had not really happened to me or had it? (p. 59)

Forrest (1981), recalls her first night alone after her divorce. According to her, she had been alone in the house before, but those were times when her husband was away on business or visiting relatives and she had the assurance he would be back. That night she says was different, he would never be back, not ever! The reality of becoming single again can be awfully frightening and painful except for those who felt emancipated as a result of the divorce, and even then, there are still mixed feelings, especially when the reality sets in.

Grollman and Sams (1978), captured the feelings of devastation when someone suddenly becomes single again:

> Nobody wants me. Who could love me? You feel rejected, put aside, cast off, alone, naked, unprotected. Time drags, days are long, nights are longer. You find no pleasure in anything or anyone. You are useless. You are empty. So is the world around you. (p. 45)

During this period of ambivalence this searching for self, one has to come to grips with the reality that one is not just single again but one is now an "Ex-partner," "Ex-lover," "Ex-husband," "Ex-wife." Embracing this reality makes one suffer not only from the direct physical and emotional consequences of the victimizing event, but from the disapproving responses and labeling of others. Unfortunately, over the years few demographic groups have remained immune from marital disruption. Education, social status, age, finance, race, religion and the presence of children have not been able to diminish the rate of divorce or separation.

Becoming single again is not only from the loss of a spouse through divorce or separation. Many people have the unfortunate experience of losing their spouse to death. This may be due to a sudden or unanticipated experience or a terminal disease. When one becomes single through widowhood it may demand major life adjustments.

A person who becomes single by the death of a spouse has a dual dilemma. He/she is coping with the grief and loss of the spouse while having to reorganize and restructure the management of life. If children are involved, the state of singleness caused by widowhood may be overwhelming. The children will need to adapt to the changes that will be necessary for the survival of the family.

The dynamics of the family adjustment may become even more complicated if the surviving spouse begins to date soon after the death of the spouse.

Often, when children are involved, they perceive this as disloyalty to the deceased and may develop resentment to the surviving parent. This strain may create a cycle of relationships that may become conflictual, thus lending to family dysfunctions.

In order to fully understand the impact of a separation and the human behavior associated with it, we must first have some understanding of the challenges of singleness. While the spouses may have anticipated that a divorce or separation may have ended the problems, they are likely to find that they are in a state of constant battle with their Ex. Also, the reality is, with a divorce, there are usually no flowers, cards and little support. Single people are at times ostracized, criticized and rejected. This makes it painful for them, and as a result they themselves may see singleness as a dysfunction.

## *Is Singleness A Dysfunction?*

So you are single again, are you now dysfunctional? Have you lost your ability to cope, to survive, to advance, to shine? I did my clinical internship at Brooklyn hospital in Brooklyn, N.Y. It was during the long months of theory and practice that I developed a commanding use of the book *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual for Mental Disorders* used often by mental health professionals. One observation I made about this diagnostic manual is that singleness is not listed as a dysfunction. Hence it is correct to conclude that singleness in and of itself is not a dysfunction, neither is it pathological.

Unfortunately, there are some singles that behave in a dysfunctional way. They make rash decisions, they are disingenuous, stubborn, conniving, argumentative, and they negatively triangulate other relationships. Sadly also, some single men have earned the reputation of being foxy, deceitful, dishonest, abusive, and toxic and they do not live up to their potentials.

Let the record show however, that the majority of singles do not behave as such. Instead, there are single men and women who behave in a decent, wholesome, honest and upright way. These singles must be respected and appreciated for who they are. They are successful, levelheaded, progressive, ambitious, and effervescent and make a great contribution to the family, church, school and society. They are not dysfunctional for singleness is not a dysfunction.

While it is true that becoming single again marks the loss of a "socially valued status," the single person must realize that this event is not the loss of a "socially valued self." You are never an "Ex-child of God". The fact that you are "fearfully and wonderfully made" (Psalm 139:14) is enough reason to continue your self-care. Face your reality with determination, poise and dignity.

## *The Emotions that Come with Being Single Suddenly*

**Undifferentiated sadness:** comes as a result of the loss of a relationship or a loved one. Some singles try to block sadness through excessive activity, only to find the sadness emerging at odd times. The level of a single's differentiation will determine the degree of the sadness experienced.

**Episodic anger:** is experienced sporadically after a divorce/separation and sometimes through the death of a spouse. When anger is turned inward, it may lead to depression or suicide. Outward anger, however, is directed at the spouse, sometimes children, family members, friends, church and even God.

**Feelings of loneliness:** To go to bed one night with a spouse in your life and to wake up the next day and find that you are alone is frightening. Friends and family can better help with social loneliness than with emotional loneliness.

**Irrational helplessness:** One factor that makes the experience of being single suddenly so stressful, is the feeling of helplessness and sometimes hopelessness. When singles see every situation as awful it renders them crippled, thus disqualifying the positive and absorbing the negative.

**Shock and awe:** Singles that were in denial of the reality of their marital problems, or were experiencing pseudo-mutuality, often experienced more shock and awe after their divorce/ separation.

**Preoccupation with revenge fantasies:** Painful breakups frequently lead to a desire to get even to the extent that we develop what is called "revenge fantasies". Thoughts such as, "If only I could hurt him/her the way I was hurt." "It would give me joy to see him/her suffer". The Bible gives help for this dysfunctional fantasy: "Beloved, do not avenge yourselves, but rather give place to wrath; for it is written, 'Vengeance is Mine, I will repay,' says the Lord" (Romans 12:19).

**Excessive guilt or resentment:** Excessive guilt or resentment is pathological. Guilt comes when a single feels that he or she did not do enough to sustain the relationship or it is their fault why the relationship deteriorates or the person dies. Resentment comes from a lack of healing or unfinished business.

**Heightened or decreased sense of spirituality:** It is not uncommon for one's religiosity to intensify after a severe loss. For example, a single whose marriage failed, might say something like this, "Lord if you restore my marriage, I promise that I will be faithful to you." They pray frequently and long, some even fast and enter study groups. Unfortunately, these bargaining episodes seldom work.

**Social Withdrawal:** Anxiety producing situations can create social phobia. After the breakup of a relationship, singles can become so self-absorbed in their pain or disappointment that they refuse to participate in any social activity.

**Absentminded Behavior:** It is not unnatural for persons experiencing singleness again to become absentminded and forget important dates, events and tasks. Oftentimes their minds are preoccupied with the memory of the loss, the pain of the break up, the embarrassment of the situation or the apprehension of the future.

## *Managing the Emotions that Come with Being Single Suddenly*

**Provide time for grieving:** Psychologically speaking there is such a thing as normal grief. Clinically, fourteen days is considered sufficient time to return to basic functioning, such as going back to work, school and the completion of basic personal and household tasks. Understand therefore, that you should give yourself enough time to grieve.

**Recognize your emotional feelings:** Don't mask it. The first task of healing from the pain of divorce, separation or death of a spouse is to accept that the event took place. There should be no rationalization, justification, suppression of emotion, distorted thinking, self-loathing or denial. For example, do not perceive yourself as a bad person because you are feeling angry; remember the Bible says, "do not be angry, and do not sin" (Ephesians 4:26). Recognize the feeling in order to manage it.

## *Work through the Pain of the Loss*

**Explore defenses and coping style:** Defense mechanisms are numerous and they are often used at convenient times to obscure reality or to distort behavior. For example, singles with children may subconsciously resort to the use of displacement. That is, you may shift uncomfortable feelings and emotions unto your child, and scream at him/her because they are less powerful and less threatening than the spouse from whom the feelings originated.

## *Accept the Circumstances of Your New Situation*

**Find meaning to the loss:** There is a text in the Bible that says: "all things work together for good to those who love God" (Romans 8:28). The text is not saying that every misfortune is for our good, to the contrary, the text is saying that God is working with us in every situation, good or bad, for our good. That is, no matter the struggle, pain, heartache, loss or disappointment, God is with us and will work things out ultimately for our good.

### *Let Go and Let God*

Withdraw the emotional energy from the circumstances of the separation and re-invest them in self and God. It calls for "striking another match." Striking another match can include developing a future romantic relationship, developing personal autonomy and individual resilience.

God has ultimate control over your life, let go and let Him lead. His assurance is that, "When you pass through the waters, I will be with you" (Isaiah 43:2) the magnitude of the separation does not matter, you are never alone, for God is with you. He has promised that He "will never leave you nor forsake you" (Hebrews 13:5).

### *Identify Pathology and get Professional Help*

You will not be able to mitigate every situation yourself. Sometimes you will have to get help and not just help but professional help.

### *Improve Social Competence*

If as a single person you feel you have deficits in social competence, it can inhibit your ability to initiate and maintain healthy consenting relationships after your loss. Singles should seek to develop social competence, through self-esteem, self-assertion and self-assurance.

### *To Re-marry or to Burn*

Re-marriage, when done correctly and in harmony with God's word, is a healing gift from God. However, singles should watch for quick rebounds, opportunists, fakes and the desire to compensate one's immediate apprehension. Statistically speaking, second time marriages occur faster than first time marriages .

The Apostle Paul states in the New Testament: "But I say to the unmarried and to the widows: It is good for them if they remain even as I am; but if they cannot exercise self-control, let them marry. For it is better to marry than to burn with passion (1Corinthians 7:8-9). Is Paul's concern one of marriage or singleness? I submit that Paul's greater concern was the high ideal of singleness. Paul's wish is for some Christians to remain single, for him this is an ideal to attain. He gives various reasons, but the primary concern is in light of the "Perousa" (the second coming of Christ). Paul is saying that if Christians cannot attain to this high spiritual ideal, then it would be better for them to get married, for it is better to marry than to burn.

### *To Re-marry or to Co-habit*

In the biblical account of the woman caught in adultery, she is said to have been married five times, however, she was not married to the man she was currently living with. Co-habitation has been somewhat tabooed by society even long before this woman's encounter with Jesus. However, in recent years, society seems to have changed its position and have become more tolerant. The US Census Bureau indicates that since 1997, a little more than four million couples are living together, and a large number of them are raising children. Despite this high number, living together before marriage does not guarantee marital success. Cohabitation is against the will of God and it is still living in sin. Therefore, to re-marry is a choice, to co-habit is not.

Facing your reality and moving ahead no matter your status is what all individuals must do to make the best use of the gift of life that God gives. If you were married and lost your spouse through death, separation or divorce it is an event. However, you are not a failure; failure is an event, not a person. Accept your lot and place yourself in the center of God's will. Protect and guard your mental and emotional health by staying positive, optimistic and hopeful. Make new friends, enhance your self-care and feel good about the untapped opportunities that are ahead of you.

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## *Handout 1*
## *Problems Facing Singles*

The problems listed below are not unique to single people, however, these are among the leading concerns of singles. The list is not exhaustive, neither are all problems applicable to any one person.

- Problems with self-worth
- Problems with loneliness
- Problems with identity and direction
- Problems with the desire for sex
- Problems with feelings of rejection & desperation
- Problems with financial insecurity
- Problems with the desire to have children
- Problems with society's expectations
- Problems with the church's expectations
- Problems with married people
- Problems finding ambitious and honest mates
- Temptations to compromise values
- Problems with pressure to get re-married

**What Single Persons Can Do**

- Develop strong self-esteem.
- Know that singleness is not pathological.
- Take control of your life.
- Develop a network of wholesome friends.
- Make use of services and resources.
- Participate in single's support groups and retreats.
- Plan social activities for yourself/join activities with others.
- Be aware of your environment and make use of opportunities.
- Actively participate in church programs and functions.
- Keep friends who are optimistic and share a high level of spirituality.
- Be careful and alert: Do not allow yourself to be taken for granted.
- Do not be intimidated by the business world, stand up for your rights.

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- Be optimistic and realistic, avoid irrational ideas.
- Be careful about second marriages. Explore all the implications of stepfamilies.
- Watch out for wolves in sheep's clothing. Do not be fooled by romantic passes. Keep focused.
- Develop your own interest; do not be bored with life. Take vacations; visit other places, churches, social gatherings, etc. Do not be reclusive.
- If you are interested in raising children, explore the possibility of adoption.
- Develop a rich prayer life and an active faith in God.
- Enjoy fellowship by attending regular church services.

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## *Handout 2*
## *Twelve Steps to Take for Self-preservation and Growth*

1. Do not feed into the multiple emotions of anger, rejection, guilt, shame, feelings of failure, and fear. These emotions are not eternal, don't make them annuals, neither should you turn them into perennials. So accept that there is hope after a divorce or the death of a spouse. Remember, you will not feel this way forever.
2. Create a network of family and friends who will have a positive influence on you.
3. Avoid people who are sulky, pessimistic, revengeful, deceitful, conniving, backstabbing or those who will only tell you what you want to hear.
4. Associate yourself with people who are able to help you face your reality.
5. Never perceive yourself as a victim. See yourself as a survivor and determine to pick up the pieces. You see, victims are engulfed in learned helplessness; survivors are conquerors and overcomers.
6. Establish positive self-talk; convince yourself that you are capable and able to live a successful life as a single person, much like many individuals who have never been married.
7. Claim God's promises to protect you and provide for you and that "He will never leave you nor forsake you." (Hebrews 13:5)
8. If you have young children, establish a routine and as much as possible keep their lives as stable as you are able to. If possible, keep them in the same school where their social network exists. Make appropriate childcare arrangements and always have an alternative plan in place.
9. If possible, establish and maintain a civil relationship and open communication with the divorce parent about issues and concerns that are related to the children.
10. Give yourself permission to move forward: don't be afraid to strike another match, but watch for quick rebound.
11. Face your reality: You are divorced not dead. If the loss of your spouse leaves you feeling striped of your social status or benefits, then, do not spend precious time daydreaming over the lost. Create a new norm. Re-focus, re-group and review your options.
12. Tell yourself that this too will pass: grief and loss are natural after a divorce. Give yourself permission to grieve the loss of your marriage, the possible loss of extended family and friends but see this as a possibility for a new construction.

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Get involved in meaningful hobbies and activities; let church attendance and participation become part of your new norm. Remember, a failed marriage is only an event; you are not a failure! God is waiting to partner with you to open new doors. Let go of negative emotions and ask God to forgive you for ways in which you may have contributed to the failure of your marriage. Most importantly, forgive yourself and your ex-spouse, forgive for the peace of your own soul, forgive because the past is the past and most of all, forgive because God has already forgiven you. Yes! "weeping may endure for the night, but joy comes in the morning" (Psalm 30: 5). There is life after a divorce and if it is God's will and your desire, don't be afraid to strike another match in the future.

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# Faith and a Box of Cereal

*Adapted by Elaine Oliver and Rosemay Cangy*

*For this object lesson you will need:*

A large cereal box with cereal (choose one that is familiar to the children)
A large empty cereal box with crayons in it (one small box of crayons will work)
2 cereal bowls
A grocery bag

*Before the lesson, place the three items in the grocery bag.*

Slowly, pull out the cereal box containing the crayons from the grocery bag and show it to the children. You can even shake the box a little.

**Say to the children:** Raise your hand if you can guess what's in this box.

Allow the children to answer.

Pull out a cereal bowl out of the grocery bag, then deliberately and carefully pour the crayons into the bowl.

**Act surprised:** What? It's not cereal?

**Say:** What happened?

Ask one of the children who can read to say what is on the label on the box.

**Ask:** What does it say? Allow the child to answer.

**Say:** It says it's cereal, it sounds like cereal. Our eyes and our ears told us it was cereal but it was not cereal.

Now pull out the other cereal box.

**Say:** I have another box. It looks like it is cereal, it sounds like cereal (shake the box) but let's find out for sure if it really is cereal.

Pull out the other cereal bowl and ask an older child to assist a younger child in pouring out the cereal into the next bowl.

**Act relieved and say:** Oh, good, this box really has cereal.

**Say:** Sometimes things aren't really as they appear to be and we can't be sure that our eyes and ears are truly seeing and hearing things the way they are. There is one thing we can always be sure of and that is God's love for each one of you and me. The Bible tells us in Hebrews 11:1 that faith is to be sure of the things that we have not seen. God is as sure as the box of breakfast cereal that always has breakfast cereal in it. When you have faith in God, you can trust him and believe that He will always take care of you.

**Prayer:** Dear Jesus, we want to have faith in You. Teach us to believe in you and trust you even if we can't see you. Thank you for always loving us.

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# How Jeff Witnessed During the Forest Fire

Jeff Crandall leaned on his hoe. Another row and a half of string beans, and he would have the garden weeded for a couple of weeks at least. He heard the roar of a plane overhead. He looked at the billowing cloud of smoke rising, hot and glowing. It was behind Rattlesnake Ridge only three miles away.

The wind puffed up, blowing dust across the dry garden. Jeff knew such breezes fanned the fire and blew it across roads and rivers that should have stopped it. Twenty-four thousand acres of pear and apple orchards had already been burned.

The sun beat down on Jeff's bare back. He wiped the back of his hand across his forehead and finished up the last few feet of the row. Then he dragged out the hose and gave the struggling plants a drink of cool water.

Well, that's that, Jeff thought to himself. He went into the house for supper. He washed his hands at the kitchen sink. Then, leaning over the faucet, he splashed water on his face and neck.

The fire was on everyone's mind at the dinner table. Jeff's little brother, Eric, looked at Dad with wide, frightened eyes and asked if it was getting any closer.

"Hard to tell, son," Dad answered. "But if it does, someone will warn us before it gets too dangerous." He ruffled Eric's brown hair. "Don't worry, Son. God will take care of us."

"Well, we may be able to get away from the fire," Jeff said, "but if it comes up our hill, there won't be much we can do to stop it from burning the house down."

"That's true, Jeff, but there's no use worrying about it. Remember, 'All things work together for good to them that love God.'"

At worship that evening, just before they went to bed, the Crandall family prayed that God would protect them from the fire. Jeff lay awake in bed for longer than usual, thinking about the flames raging through the brittle undergrowth only three miles away.

It seemed to him that he had just floated off to sleep when Dad was shaking his shoulder. "The fire's getting too close," he said. "We have to leave."

Jeff scrambled out of bed and slipped a pair of jeans over his pajamas. He grabbed his jacket and followed Dad down the hall to the living room, where Mother was helping Eric button his sweater. Dad opened the front door. The sleepy family went out to the car. Farther up the hill Jeff could see the first line of the fire beginning to burn bushes, little more than two city blocks away.

"Is it going to burn the house down, Dad?" he asked as his father got in beside him.

"We've cleared away most of the weeds around the place," Dad said, "but if the big oak tree next to the house catches fire, we may be in trouble."

Dad started up the motor and drove down the hill toward town. "Where will we go?" Eric asked.

"The Red Cross has arranged for people to stay in the high-school gym," Dad said. "We'll have to stay there the rest of the night at least."

When they arrived at the school, other families were filing into the gym. A woman stood at the door, writing names on a clipboard. Inside, cots stood in neat rows, and at the far end of the gym, volunteers served fruit juice and doughnuts.

The Crandalls found four empty cots and got ready to spend the rest of the night. "Dad," Jeff asked, "God will take care of the house, won't He?"

"He will if it's for the best, Jeff."

"Well, how could it ever be for the best to lose your home and everything in it?"

Dad smiled. "It isn't always easy for us to understand, son, but we have to remember that God can make good things come out of bad."

"Why don't we pray that God will watch over our house tonight," Mother suggested. So the Crandall family bowed their heads together right there in the high-school gym, and each took a turn talking to God.

When Dad finished the last prayer, Jeff slipped under the blanket of his cot. Just then, he noticed another boy about his own age lying wide awake only three cots away. The boy looked frightened. He was watching Jeff as if he wanted to ask him a question but was afraid to.

Jeff threw his blanket back, got up and went over to the boy's cot. "Hi," he said. "I'm Jeff. What's your name?"

"Kevin," the boy mumbled. "I didn't mean to stare. What were you and your family doing just now?"

"Oh, do you mean when we were praying? We were asking God to watch over our house tonight and to keep it safe from the fire."

"Do you really think praying does any good?"

"Sure," Jeff said.

"Well, would you pray to God for me and ask Him to protect my house too?"

"Sure, but there's no trick to it. You can do it yourself, you know."

"I'd rather have you do it."

The two boys bowed their heads together, and Jeff prayed for the protection of Kevin's home.

When the prayer was over, Jeff's new friend smiled shyly. "Thanks," he said. "I've never really prayed before."

"Well, listen," Jeff said. "Would you like to go to church with me sometime? I think you'd like it."

"I'll have to ask Dad," Kevin said, pointing to his father sleeping on the next cot. "But I don't think he'd mind."

Finally both boys lay back down on their cots. The clock on the gym wall showed 3:00 a.m. Jeff's eyes got very heavy, and he was soon asleep.

When Jeff awoke in the morning, Kevin was already up and was folding his blanket. Seeing Jeff awake, he came over and said, "Dad says it's OK for me to go to church with you sometime."

"Great," Jeff grinned. They gave each other their phone numbers. Just then Jeff's dad called for them to leave.

As they were walking out to the car, Jeff was thinking about Kevin. "You know, Dad," he said, "I think I understand now what the Bible means when it says, `All things work together for good to them that love God.' I was worried about our house burning down, but if it hadn't been for the fire, I'd have never met Kevin. I made a new friend and had a chance to tell him about Jesus."

"Well," Dad said, "we've been doubly blessed, then. The police officer who came to tell us we could go home said the fire missed our house."

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*Adapted from Swanson, G. (1991). "Families Reaching Families", Family Ministries Resource Book, North American Division of the Seventh-day Adventists.*

# Family Ties

**For this object lesson you will need:**

- a ball of yarn or string
- a pair of blunt scissors
- a small picture of Jesus
- an adult helper

**Ask the children, "Who is in your family?"**

(Draw out their responses, making comments like, "Yes, you have a daddy in your family: a mother, a sister, a brother." Be careful to phrase your response so as not to imply that all families are alike, i.e. that all families have a father, mother, kids. In fact, it would be good to note along the way that families are different. It is important to keep your comments positive, i.e., "You and your grandma make up your family,". It could be very hurtful to point out that a particular child does not have a father. At some point you may have to help them think beyond the home in which they live to include extended family members, e.g., grandma, grandpa, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc.)

(As you are soliciting answers, you will need an adult helper to create the object lesson. You want to create a network of strings between you and each of the children to represent family relationships. In the end, you will hold one end of all the pieces of string, and each child will hold the other end of one of the pieces of string in their hand. As the children think of various members of their families, have your helper cut an appropriate length of string to connect you with each one of the children. Hold your ends of string under your thumb behind the picture of Jesus without letting the children see the picture, while your helper cuts off an appropriate length of string and puts the other end in a child's hand to represent a relationship with a family member. Use as many lengths of string as you need to represent sisters, brothers, aunts, uncles, cousins, etc. so that when you finish, every child is holding a string.)

Look! Everyone is connected! It doesn't matter how old you are, or what color you are, or whether you are rich or poor, tall or short, or whatever. The Bible says everyone is part of the family. God put us in families to love and take care of each other. He put us in families so we could have fun and learn how to treat each other with respect and kindness. He knew we would need someone to help us sometimes. He knew family is the best place to learn about God. And He wants our families to show His love to the world. That's why He made you part of a family at home, and part of His big family here at church.

Do you know who it is who holds all of us together? The Bible says Jesus is the One who holds families together. (Lift the picture of Jesus for the children to see, while continuing to hold all the strings behind it.) Jesus is the One who makes us all part of God's family too.

I'm glad I'm part of my family. I'm especially glad we're all part of God's big family because of Jesus. Aren't you?

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*Story adapted from Flowers, K. (2001). "Families of Faith", Family Ministries Planbook, Department of Family Ministries, North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists.*

# The Family and Adventist Schools Joining Hands

*by Sally Lam-Phoon*

"Our ideals resemble the stars, which illuminate the night.
No one will ever be able to touch them.
But the men who, like the sailors on the ocean,
take them for guides,
will undoubtedly reach their goal."[1]

The author of the above quote, Carl Schurz (1829-1906), who lived about the same time as Ellen G. White, was a German-American legislator, reformer and journalist. All through his life, he expressed his ideals through public speeches as well as his pen. Yes, our ideals seem as unreachable as the stars but if we set our course by these "stars", we will be on the right track. In this imperfect, transient life on earth the best we can do is to reach towards those ideals in Adventist education; keeping them in full view so that they can determine our course.

This paper presents one of these ideals—a close-knit relationship between the family and Adventist education. These two institutions join hands in collaboration for the building up of our children not only for this life, but also for the life to come where the ideal can be within our reach. Yes, we may be short-staffed and overworked, saying, "Please, not another helping on my plate!" Hopefully, the following will allow us to take stock and take time to focus on the ideal that will keep our families and schools on course.

At Creation, the ideal education system established in the Garden of Eden was centered in the family where God and the parents were the main instructors. After the fall, when parents "became indifferent to their obligation to God, indifferent to their obligation to

1 http://www.germanheritage.com/biographies/mtoz/schurz.html (accessed March 8, 2010).

their children" (White, 1942, p. 45), the schools of the prophets were established to stem the tide of evil. This certainly has a familiar ring to our current reality.

The strong and destructive pull of secularism among Christian families is threatening to destroy the very citadel for the protection and nurture of the young. Satan has discovered how effective his schemes can be if they are focused on the fragmentation of the family, keeping parents so busy in the pursuit of a "better life" for the family that they don't have time for their top priority— the work of character building in their children, spending precious time with their family and laying a strong foundation for the time when the children leave home to go to school.

For these overworked and overstretched, harassed parents, when children arrive at school age they breathe a sigh of relief that their heavy burdens are finally over and they can relegate the training of their children to those who are professionally trained (or so they think) in the schools.

With this disengagement between the family and the school, many parents have no idea what is happening to their children until they receive a note (usually reporting some misbehavior) from the school. This occasions a short visit to the principal/counselor's office, getting a quick fix to get the child back on track until the next time a note comes to the parents again.

Moreover, Adventist parents who support Christian education and send their children to Adventist schools often presume that the salvation of their children is assured because the school will now shoulder the responsibility of the spiritual, academic and social development of the young ones.

Hence the burden placed upon the shoulders of Adventist schools is a heavy one. Expectations run high, and often we wonder if this is how it should be. Given our current milieu of the disintegrating family, Adventist educators find that they have to invest an inordinate amount of time addressing the needs of children from dysfunctional families. Teachers have often remarked, "We feel that we have to play the role of social workers on top of our role as teachers."

As if this is not enough, scores of teens are leaving the church after high school. Concerned Christian leaders are calling attention to the stark reality of the spirituality of families seriously impacting the Christian Church in general. Josh McDowell (2006) reports that from a survey done with denominational leaders, as many as 94% of teens leave the church after high school (p.13). Valuegenesis I, a 10-year study (involving 1,500 subjects and ending with 783 subjects at the end of 10 years) (Dudley, 2000) of why teens leave the church discovered that more than 50% of Adventist youth leave the church in their 20's.[2] In Korea where Christian education and Adventist schools are thriving, there is an estimated 70% dropout rate from church attendance after students graduate from an Adventist high schools or university. George Barna (2002) reported that 70% of teens leave the church after they leave home (p. 110).

2 http://kidsindiscipleship.org/about/why_children/ (accessed March 8, 2010).

Where have we been amiss in the religious upbringing of our children and the delivery of Adventist education? When did we start sliding down this slippery slope of losing our young people to the world even after growing up in an Adventist family and faithfully attending church every week? Even after they have come through our own schools where the Bible is taught? The reasons are multi-factorial—the increasing demoralizing influence of secularism on our young people, the eroding effects of broken homes, lack of proper parental guidance, no worship in the home, critical church members, etc.

Larry Fowler (2009), a key influencer of children's ministries around the world, traces the root cause for children leaving the church in their teens to the weak spiritual foundation the child has received up to the age of twelve. He points out that the first twelve years of a child's life is "a critical window of opportunity for both worldview development and for a child to respond to the gospel and place his or her faith in Christ" (p. 32). Unfortunately, most parents are quite oblivious to the fact that all that has been learned in the first twelve years impact their child's life choices throughout life.

This should not come as a surprise to Adventists who believe in the counsels of Ellen White (1954) regarding the first education that the child receives right within the family. She wrote:

> The lessons that the child learns during the first seven years of life have more to do with forming his character than all that it learns in future years. Neither infants, children, or youth should hear an impatient word from father, mother, or any member of the household; for they receive impressions very early in life, and what parents make them today, they will be tomorrow . . . The first lessons impressed upon the child are seldom forgotten. . . .
>
> The impressions made on the heart early in life are seen in after years. They may be buried, but they will seldom be obliterated. (pp. 193, 194)

Deuteronomy 6:4-7 is often referred to as a mandate for Christian education which has its foundations in the home where parents serve as the primary disciplers. The parents are fully responsible for the religious upbringing of their children. To further strengthen this foundation, the church and school come in as secondary disciplers of young minds. Ellen White (1943) emphasizes that:

> It is in the home school that our boys and girls are to be prepared to attend the church school. Parents should constantly keep this in mind, and as teachers in the home should consecrate every power of the being to God, that they may fulfill their high and holy mission. Diligent, faithful instruction in the home is the best preparation that children can receive for school life. Wise parents will help their children to understand that in the school life, as in the home, they are to strive to please God, to be an honor to Him. (p. 150)

Under inspiration, Ellen White (1943) stresses the immensity of the influence that can be impressed upon the child of both "temporal and eternal things" in the "first twelve or fifteen years" in the work of character formation. Further, she decries obtaining merely "book knowledge" but emphasized the integration of knowledge into the practical life (p. 195).

If our Adventist schools stay true to the adage that "redemption and education are one" and if they are to play the part in the education of our own young people and all who enter its gates, then our schools need to seek the partnership of the family in order to fully achieve its purposes. How sad it is when children begin to attend school, most parents assume that their job is done and it is then the responsibility of the school to take over their nurture and development.

Ellen White (1923) traces much of the disciplinary problems found in schools to homes where there is "a superficial education" (p. 65). She says in no uncertain terms that if parents fail to mold the characters of their children with loving discipline in the early years of their lives, then we cannot expect the teachers to be effective in the classroom (p. 69).

The reality of today's situation is that parents expect the school to do wonders in terms of disciplining, guiding and correcting their children. A number of Adventist parents perceive our boarding schools as reform institutions when they have problems controlling their children at home. Interestingly enough, in a 10-year study of teenagers and why they leave the church, Dudley (2000, p.73) comes to the conclusion that boarding academies do not appear to contribute to keeping our children in church. Shane Anderson (2009) in his thought-provoking book, *How to Kill Adventist Education* (*And How to Give It a Fighting Chance!*), believes that if young people have not been disciplined and trained in the first 14 years of life, "most boarding schools simply cannot turn that tide around and produce the model citizen their parents at home envision" (p.47).

In the eyes of many parents, the school takes on the role of the primary discipler of their children when they are of school age. Therefore, it is wise for the school to educate parents regarding their role as primary disciplers and hence, it is of vital importance that the school draws the family into a cooperative effort in the education of their children.

Even a few secular educators recognize this as an essential element for school success. Gary Marx (2006), in his book, *Focused Leadership*, quotes Jim Sweeney, a professor at Iowa State University who filtered out 10 factors essential to a "winning school climate" gleaned from research among hundreds of schools. Among these 10 factors is closeness to parents and community (p. 147).

Dennis Littky (2004) is another successful educational leader who believes in this concept. The link between the school and family is key to Littky's success with ailing schools. This concept is woven into the fabric of their school culture. "From the day they decide to enroll their child in our school, Met families know that we want and need their input even beyond graduation" (p. 137).

At one of his schools, the Metropolitan Regional Career and Technical Center (The Met) the motto is: "We enroll families." Littky believes that when children enroll in a school, their parents should also be enrolled because they ought to be very much a part of their child's learning, be their child's mentor and advisor. In his school, parents are invited to visit the school often, observe classes, serve as judges in the school exhibition, go on field trips etc. They are serious about family involvement. He writes in his book, *The Big Picture: Education is Everybody's Business:*

> First, parents become members of their child's Learning Plan Team . . . Every quarter, they serve as panel members at their child's exhibition and are asked to give critical feedback on their child's progress. Finally at the end of the four years, exhausted and elated from their intense participation, the parents get up in front of the school and sign their child's diploma, along with the principal, the board chairman, and the state commissioner of education. (p. 147)

He continues to say, "I am still so often considered a rebel when it comes to fighting for parents' inclusion in their children's education." While we think that the professionals are those working in the schools and they are the ones to know what's best for the children, he retorts: "Who are we to make decisions for other people's kids?" He firmly believes that engaging families in education is key to activating "a built-in support system that works to help both students and teachers do a better job" (p. 144).

If secular educational leaders believe in close ties between the home and the school, shouldn't Adventist schools be even more enthusiastic about fostering this close relationship? Particularly when the Enemy is closing in with fiercer attacks for the souls of our children, we need to be even more vigilant. The clarion call is found in Malachi 4:6, the Elijah Message, which is to strengthen the family in the last days. The Message Bible puts it this way: "He will convince parents to look after their children and children to look up to their parents. If they refuse, I'll come and put the land under a curse."

The command from the Lord is clear—parents are called to serve as the primary disciple-makers of their children. If we are to help our children form characters that can withstand the test of time, they will have to be empowered to be disciples of Jesus Christ. Their commitment, salvation and relationship with the Savior cannot be a vicarious one achieved through their parents. Parents have a responsibility to guide their children towards having their own direct relationship with Christ and becoming His disciples. When children grow in their own personal faith experience, the possibility of their staying in the church throughout their lives can be increased.

The Dudley study quoted earlier came to a very noteworthy conclusion on family nurtured faith. It discovered that the influence of parental modeling of their spiritual life is one of the most significant factors in keeping our youth committed to the church. However, he cautions that we cannot jump to the conclusion that all teens who come from strong spiritually oriented homes will be faithful as well but the probability stands true that if parents are spiritually active in church and committed to their marriage, there is a strong likelihood that their teens and young people will stay in the church.

With this understanding, this is why it is so vital that the school, which is a secondary disciple-maker, needs to unite its efforts with the parents, the primary disciple-makers, who understand their children to affect the best outcomes for their spiritual, mental and social growth.

The Adventist educational system has grown to include all types of schools—true-blue church schools where most of the students come from Adventist homes; mission schools where the majority of the students are not Adventist; second-chance Adventist-run schools

where many at-risk students attend in the hope of a turnaround (sometimes by choice; other times by force of parents) to name a few. In all of these schools we have students who come from dysfunctional homes, homes that could find the answer to life's problems if, as a school, we see a need to reach out to parents in their distress. What better way to share the Gospel than in answer to a real need right in our midst. This is mission at its best!

> If we will open our hearts and homes to the divine principles of life we shall become channels for currents of life-giving power. From our homes will flow streams of healing, bringing life and beauty and fruitfulness where now are barrenness and dearth. (White, 1942, p. 355)

Considering all that is on our plate, it is already filled to overflowing; the question is how much more can we do? Most parents don't have the time or the energy to connect with the school but at least if an attempt is made, there is the possibility of helping a young person or one family along the way. Perhaps if we reach for the ideal and make an effort, at least we are making progress in the right direction even if we don't ever reach that ideal.

Here are some recommendations about linking the school with the family for your consideration and dialogue:

1. Pray for a change of mindset starting from the leader, trickling down to the faculty regarding re-connecting the family with the school. Educate your faculty and staff so that they invest in this ideal and personally commit to this new school culture.
2. Begin to establish a "family culture" where you enroll families, not just the students.
3. Start a database of information about each family made available to the church pastor, chaplain and teachers.
4. Share this with the pastor so he can get the church involved in supporting this new school culture. Church members who are professionals in counseling or the family may be enlisted to help.
5. Get the pastor so enthused that he will preach sermons on Christian education regularly and encourage his congregation to send their children and young people to the Adventist school.
6. Involve the parents in school events, school projects and get them to drop by and visit, sit in a classroom, assist in the library, serve as judges in the annual talent show or exhibition.
7. Design school events to engage the family wherever possible. Engage families in social environments such as family days, picnics, campouts or afternoon teas.
8. Share the spiritual master plan in simple terms with the parents periodically so that they can reinforce in the home what the school is doing.
9. Send notes home when the children do well, not only to highlight negative behavior. Use modern vehicles of communication—through blogs, a webpage, SMS, Facebook etc.
10. Where possible, teachers could visit homes to get to know the families better.
11. Conduct family seminars as areas of need arise to help parents do a better job at parenting.
12. Emphasize the role of parents as the main disciplers of their children.

When families become part of the school culture, the blessings are tremendous. You will have more hands to assist as parents who have the time, energy and resources pitch in to help in field trips, in the library, as counselors in line with their abilities. Your parents become your most effective marketing agents as they swap stories with other families. Parents who have the resources will become your biggest donors as needs for equipment, facilities and buildings present themselves.

In the book, *We Can Keep Them in the Church*, Noelene Johnsson (2004) tells the story of a child missing in the cornfields of the Midwest during a blizzard. A search for the child was unsuccessful. As the search was about to be called off, the parents begged for one last attempt. They suggested joining hands and walking across the cornfields once more. They found the child but a little too late. If only they had joined hands sooner! (p. 114)

Our children are in the midst of a big battle, a battle for their minds. The school, family and church need to join hands to counter this attack on our children. I firmly believe that when God's schools return to the ideal that the Lord has set for education, He will specially bless our schools. They will be outstanding lights in a world of darkness. Adventist families will stand as beacons of hope to a society where the family is falling apart. In joining hands, our school, families and church will testify of the practical influence of the gospel, living testimonies that will be far more effective than a thousand sermons preached.

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# Family (of God) Ministries Attachment and Nurture

*By Kathleen Beagles and Lea Danihelova*

## *Introduction*

God has blessed us with three metaphors for the church. We (the church) are referred to as the body of Christ, the bride of Christ and the family of God. Each metaphor is useful for helping us understand both our relationship with the Trinity and with one another. The following reflections, however, will spring from the concept of the church as the family of God.

Two concepts that are getting special attention right now within the church organization are the concepts of nurture and retention of church members. Recent, careful auditing of church records around the world indicate that the number of baptisms into the family of God are seldom matched by the number of those new members who are nurtured and retained within the family. Nurture, of course, is a word that associates well with the concept of family. The intertwining of the concepts of nature and nurture certainly can be observed as new members join the family of God and are nurtured by fellow family members toward a new life in Christ and away from their inherited sinful natures.

The word retention, however, is slightly farther away from the connotation of family. Retention is often used in relationship to customer service. Customer retention is a worthy concept if we are attempting to retain consumers of our particular brand of religious goods and services. However, attachment might be a more family friendly term for the relational phenomenon we are aiming for with fellow church members. “Attachment is an emotional bond to another person. Psychologist John Bowlby was the first attachment theorist, describing attachment as a ‘lasting psychological connectedness between human beings’ (Bowlby, 1969, p. 164)” (About.com). Perhaps we will better retain members in the family of God when they sense that the church is a safe haven, a secure base, an entity which, like the Father Himself, is always there for them.

## *Attachment and Nurture in a Postmodern Context*

The Adventist Church, much like other Christian denominations, is losing around 50% of their young people. Some researchers state even higher numbers. The standard forms of how we experience church, evangelization and Christianity do not seem satisfactory for the majority of the postmodern generation. There are many reasons why the situation is gloomy. The postmodern context for our young people includes a higher rate of broken families; disappointment with legalistic church practices; stagnant or almost non-existing faith of parents; media and peer influence; growing globalization; detachment from roots and moral values; growing individualism, conformism, but at the same time a growing need for authentic relationships that is not satisfied by the artificial coldness of church relationships; growing materialism caused in many cases by parents who feel guilt for not spending time with their children; and the relativism of the truth (Dudley, 2000; Cunningham, 2009).

We know that we are commissioned, as the Seventh-day Adventist family of God, to introduce people to Christ and nurture them to grow as His followers. However, it seems apparent that we need to be more intentional. This does not refer to packaging our message as propositional truths or fundamental beliefs that will appeal to consumers who we then attempt to retain, but also in the context of lived out "Family of God" to whom they can become securely attached and where they can be lovingly nurtured. According to G. T. Ng, secretary of the world church, "'Going, baptizing and teaching contribute to the accomplishing of the commission, but they are not the end in themselves'" (Brauner, 2009).

Nurture and retention (attachment) should continue strongly after a person joins the church family. The process of discipling, intentionally walking "alongside other disciples in order to encourage, equip, and challenge one another in love to grow toward maturity in Christ" (Ogden, 2003, p. 129) is an inevitable part of a bigger picture of Family (of God) Ministry—or discipleship. Discipleship is a matter of each family member following the Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, daily as He shapes one's life in community and sends one to disciple another.

## *Discipling in Community*

The process of discipling is reflective of Deuteronomy 6:4-9. The Shema is addressed to adult disciples—not only parents—in a specific religious community who are being commanded to have God in their own hearts and then to sit, walk, lie down and rise up always in a frame of mind of intentional discipling. In the Review of Religious Research it was pointed out that it "indeed 'takes a village' to socialize a child religiously" (Boyatzis & Janicki, 2003, p. 252), but that the family is the first village. Smith and Denton (2005) state that "a lot of research in the sociology of religion suggests that the most important social influence in shaping young people's religious lives is the religious life modeled and taught to them by their parents" (p. 56). They concluded, "In sum, therefore, we think that the best general rule of thumb that parents might use to reckon their children's most likely religious outcomes is this: 'We'll get what we are'" (p. 57).

If the first village in religious socialization of the young is the family, the rest of the village is the church and all those associated with it. Goodliff says that in the postmodern society "family is too fragile an institution to bear the burden of responsibility we placed upon it"

(Collinson, 2004, p. 194). Collinson continues to quote and to comment on Goodliff regarding the role of the church in the face of family breakdown in society.

> "The church, not the family, is the institution that primarily conveys God's grace and is the community to which we owe our prime allegiance." His belief strongly supports our contention that the household of faith, the discipling community, is ideally suited to the task of nurturing the spiritual development of its members no matter what the nature of their home or family environment. As the faith community with its multiplicity of gifts carries out the mission of Christ to the world, it can provide an effective environment in which children and adults are nurtured to grow and develop to the full extent of their potential. (194)

## *The Family Dynamic of Church*

"Every church is more than a collection of individual members. People in the church, as in any group, are intricately interconnected. They exist in a system that is much bigger and more powerful than the individual members. Each person both influences and is influenced by everyone else" (Richardson, 1996, p. 26). People in the church are part of a family; to belong to a family means to have the same DNA. Belonging to the church family means to have God's DNA, to become a child of God. The core of God's DNA, the core of the DNA of every child of God, is love. In this context, family ministries should not be viewed only as another ministry or program that the church offers. The church must become a family.

Some churches have understood this as a call to eliminate all age-segmented programs and create family-integrated intergenerational programing where family is the focus. The households become the basic places of nurture and evangelism where discipleship is lived in the everyday lives of the family members.

Other churches have responded to the call for family ministries by adapting the family-based model which maintains traditional age-segmented programs but emphasizes the role of the family. Family, physical and spiritual, is the basis of each of the church ministries and the place of nurture. Faith development does not occur through isolated programs but through family ministries that pull all ministries together. An important aspect of this approach is the intentional training of parents and spiritual mentors.

The third family ministries model, proposed by Timothy Paul Jones and Randy Stinson, is a family-equipping model. The age-segmented ministries and programs are seen as important, but they are rearranged to reflect the newly attained focus on parents as primary disciple-makers of the children. This model stresses the role of the church as well as the role of the parents in the spiritual nurture of believers. In the case of broken families and dysfunctional homes, the role of the parents is taken over by the church members who become spiritual parents of the new believers (Nelson & Jones, 2010).

Your church might be successfully using one of these models or may have an original model that fits the unique needs of your congregation. Without reference to the model used for your family ministries, it is important to remember that to attach and nurture a

person in the church—to raise a child of God and help her/him to develop and maintain growing relationship with God—is not a role of the parents, pastors, youth groups, or church ministries, or even family ministries. The transformation of the person is the work of the Holy Spirit. However, God decided to share with us the joy that comes from nurturing people and helping them deepen their faith. He entrusted us with this sacred task. The danger of collective responsibility, the danger of the words "we," "us," "people," "community" lies in the fact that it is often understood as "you," "he," "she." The essential questions are: who are the people that are to be nurtured? And, who should go and nurture them?

Paul claims in his letter to the Romans that "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God," and all need "being justified freely by His grace through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus," (Romans 3:23-24). This means that all need to "have put on the new man who is renewed in knowledge according to the image of Him who created him" (Colossians 3:10). All need to be ministered to, to be nurtured, to be renewed through knowing God better, and through experiencing His love expressed in the loving actions of the rest of His children.

But who is to minister to us? Let's try to put the question more specifically. Who is to minister to young children? Who is to minister to singles, to families, to the sick, to the elderly? Of course, there is a place for individual ministries and personal gifts that meet specific needs of specific groups. However, if the essence of nurture is active love, can we delegate love to a department, to a ministry or even to a specific person? Can I love the children, leaving the love for the teenagers and all other groups in the church to somebody else?

To love a person does not equal the absence of hatred toward them. It cannot be accomplished while being indifferent, nor is it fulfilled simply by feelings of love. To love a person means to be actively and sincerely concerned and involved in her/his life. To love does not mean to fulfill all the needs of a person at all times, but it does mean to be available to that person, to notice her/him and to show love whenever I can. "God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him" (1 John 4:16b). One of the mysteries of God is that through loving our sisters and brothers, through touching the members of the body of Christ, we can touch Christ Himself and be changed for eternity.

## *Conclusion*

In her book, *God's Amazing Grace*, Ellen White (1973) states,

> Find time to comfort some other heart, to bless with a kind, cheering word someone who is battling with temptation and maybe with affliction. In this blessing another with cheering, hopeful words, pointing him to the Burden Bearer, you may unexpectedly find peace, happiness, and consolation yourself. (p. 120)

As family ministries leaders and the members of the body of Christ, we are first of all responsible to minister to others, to set an example of love. However, God has given us special gifts and special calling to help to create a space for the nurture and retention (attachment) of all the members of the family of God, to help to create a place where children are welcomed, where young people can stretch their wings in safety, where families are empowered, where older

members are valued—put simply, a place where everyone feels at home. We all need to be nurtured. At the same time, we all should nurture others. Only then will the church become functional as the family of God—a safe haven, a place where each is loved and can love in return. A place where all are safely attached and nurtured.

As a result, the family of God will be "prepared for the communion of heaven because they will have heaven in their hearts" (White, 1900, p. 421).

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# Loneliness: A Spiritual Approach to a Very Human Signal

*By Commander Paul S. Anderson*

There is an ethereal and transitory feeing of isolation and/or incompleteness that descends upon most people at some time in their lives. Loneliness. It is not the best feeling in the world. Synonyms are alienation, forlornness, desolateness, friendlessness, isolation and lonesomeness.

Frequently, loneliness is associated with being alone. However, a person can be alienated, forlorn, desolate and friendless while surrounded by and perhaps in relationships with many people. Holiday gatherings offer the best example of how some people feel alone in crowds.

Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen and Marines who have served in combat have shared anecdotally that they feel isolated and lonely upon returning from the war zone. The absent dynamics of camaraderie, danger and dependence that they had lived with are gone. Safety and serenity are often uncomfortable. They become isolated in hyper vigilance. A good biblical icon of this syndrome might be Uriah the Hittite. Back from the warfront, he refused to go home and enjoy the familial comforts while his men were still on the battlefield.

At the same time, people who are unaccompanied are not always lonely. Aloneness is a state of being. Loneliness is a cognitive/emotionally charged mood about one's state of being, without regard to social location or logistics.

Loneliness is a feeling of isolation and disconnection. It is often correlated with depression and sorrow. Positively, loneliness is a demand signal for relevance, belonging and community. John Cacioppo (2008) coined the term "social pain" in his description of loneliness as "a psychological mechanism meant to alert an individual of isolation and motivate him/her to seek social connections." "It really is a fundamental human motivational state very much like hunger, thirst or pain" (Park, 2009).

There are many things that can be a catalyst for loneliness. Transition is the most common catalyst. Moving from one comfort zone to another can be disruptive, until new friends and new normals have been developed. The comfort zone may be a classroom, a school or a neighborhood.

Social mobility can also be a catalyst. Many young people feel disconnected when they transition after graduation to the professional working world. This is heightened when the new job is in an unfamiliar location.

Strangely, newlyweds often report a sense of loneliness after the honeymoon, when the practical adjustments and expectations of marriage intrude upon the romance. Chronic pain is a catalyst for loneliness also, because pain is an individual experience. While others may empathize, they can't share another person's hurt.

The Biblical narrative of Joseph is replete with indicators of the loneliness caused by disruptive transitions during his adolescence. Most informing is the names that Joseph gives to his sons. The firstborn was named Manasseh, which means, "God has caused me to forget my pain." The second son's name, Ephraim, means "God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction."

Joseph never forgot the pain of ostracism, the multiple betrayals and the social dislocations that he experienced. Even though he normalized and developed cultural competencies that allowed him to thrive in his environments of enslavement, prison and finally exaltation, he still experienced loneliness at every level.

Job promotions and leadership roles can lead to a feeling of isolation. When responsible for visioning and motivating employees, if the vision is rejected, a leader may despair and descend into workplace isolation. The records of Moses and Daniel are instructive about the loneliness of leaders.

Parents, especially during family conflict, crisis or transition may feel the dark cloud of loneliness enshrouding them. Perhaps the most grueling catalyst of loneliness is bereavement. To lose a child, sibling or spouse, especially after a long and mutually satisfying marriage, propels the survivor into immediate isolating. The aging King David, though surrounded by wealth, pomp and power, lived with moments of reflective melancholia because of the sanguinity of his youth.

These are all normal and hopefully short-lived episodes that serve as barometers of effective social integration. They can be addressed proactively by some strategies to be offered after a brief caveat about chronic loneliness.

Chronic loneliness is persistent (at least three months) rather than brief and is often accompanied by depression, anger, anxiety and guilt about a perceived wrong, failing or personal flaw over which they have no control or remedy. This circumstance is corrosive and dangerous. It is correlated to myriad of physical maladies including diabetes, cancer and arthritis. Chronic loneliness can devolve into psychological spirals of mental and behavioral health crises including physical aggression, violence, substance abuse and tragically suicide.

The remedy for chronic loneliness is similar to the prescriptive we will offer for episodic loneliness, but, should include medical evaluation, professional talk therapy, group sessions and perhaps prescribed pharmaceutical interventions.

We have captured the negative essence of loneliness. But, there is a bright side. Lest we miss it, let me emphasize that loneliness is a demand signal. Like a toothache, hunger or pain, loneliness is a neon sign marking the parameters of a new hole in the soul. It is a harbinger that a course correction is required. It is an effective springboard into self-awareness and dynamic transformation. Though a tyrannical thief of enthusiasm, loneliness is also the bearer of the twin crises of danger and opportunity.

The danger is that we will stand paralyzed by the emotional pain and atrophy socially like an underutilized muscle. The opportunity is to build new competencies, and clinch unmet challenges. It is a chance to embrace again the fact that God indwells and is the root of enthusiasm. The opportunity is imbued with the prospect that you might become more than you have been by achieving, acquiring, accomplishing and even failing at things you may never have imagined. Loneliness, rather than a test of faith can be an existential opportunity to test and prove God.

Breaking the arc of loneliness requires a three-phased attack. It starts with circumstantial awareness then moves through self-assessment. The third phase is kinetic. It requires the individual to act enthusiastically upon his or her power of belief and imagination.

Start with Ephesians 3:20. “Now to Him who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us.” Here is an often-missed spiritual dynamic that should condition whatever circumstance we find ourselves in. Whether in a lion’s den, a prison cell or an executive corporate suite, God is standing by to do through us, more than we can imagine.

If we have failed or been victimized, God is still able to invade our circumstance, and make it work for our eternal best interest. Joseph understood that concept and shared it with his brothers. The key is that we have faith, vision, purpose and follow-through. With these pillars in mind I offer 7 suggestions for breaking the bow of loneliness when it hovers over your existence.

### *1. Journaling*

This step is effective because it helps the individual transfer the internal lament onto paper. The prophet Jeremiah was often lonely and depressed. He externalized his despair by writing it down.

Many adults, especially men, stop using feeling words in their day-to-day life. They think and evaluate but fail to examine the feelings associated with events in their lives. Lamenting allows the writer to express expectations and feelings. It becomes an exercise in using descriptors and feeling words.

Once written, the circumstance can be reviewed, enhanced, clarified and assessed. This writing creates clarity and circumstantial awareness. It allows the interrogation of the identified feelings. Am I feeling this way because of something I did or because of something someone did to me? Am I disconnected because of an unmet expectation that I had or that others had of me?

Another dimension of journaling is inventuring. How often have you reviewed your life story? There is so much power in the act of storytelling. There is the power to remember, to heal, to envision, to create, to build, to explore and discover. Most of life is spent in pursuit of adventure. An inventure is an occasion to explore the interior of our existence. Inventure helps you to know who you are, how you arrived where you are and where you want to go. Write your life story and mine it for vision.

### *2. Developing Your Vision*

Loneliness is a demand signal that life is not what you want it to be. Now that we know what we don't want, employ your imagination to catch a mental glimpse of what you might prefer. This too should be written down because dreams and visions are fleeting. However, once written, a vision becomes an objective that can be planned, mapped and executed.

I was feeling stuck, lonely and depleted a few years ago. On my way home from work one day, I saw a bumper sticker on a car that caught my attention. It said, "Whatever happened to the dreams of your youth?" It blazed through my eyes, flowed into my brain down and drilled down to the core of my being. It prompted me to think of some of my youthful dreams.

I concluded that it was too late to become the first black President of the United States. But, I remembered that when I was in my 20s I wanted to go skydiving. I never did. I remembered why I didn't at 20, but I had no excuse for why I had not pursued the dream. I imagined what it would be like.

When I arrived home, I told my wife about the bumper sticker. I hesitated to tell her what I wanted to do, but she asked, "What would you do if you could recapture one of your old dreams?" Because it was alive in me, the words that articulated my vision popped out of my mouth. The enthusiasm rose from my core. She did not enjoy the same exhilarating emotion. I understood. Still, I researched jump sites at the library and read a few books at the bookstore.

Sometimes you have to go other places and talk to different people as you nurture your vision. In so doing, you expand your network. This alone might be the break in the cloud of despair. Go to the library.

Finally, I selected the site. I called and set a date. I planned, budgeted and mapped the directions. I muted my excitement, but I shared with my colleagues my plan. That would keep me accountable. I thought about it every day.

A few months later, I did it. At 10,300 feet above the earth, I rolled out of an airplane into the most exhilarating experience of my life, to date. My wife had told people. My brother

and a nephew decided to come along. She posted pictures on Facebook. It created a new community of discussion.

Developing your vision requires faith and proactive follow-through. Visions are living things that are murdered by doubt and procrastination.

### *3. Take Action*

The divine declaration "let there be…" released the active agent of creation and what was declared, became. From the mind of God through the voice of God, all that is and will ever be was set in motion. The creative engine is still at work. We however, have to do more than speak to make visions into reality. We must put in some effort.

I give God the credit for creativity. Developing your vision is a spiritual process. It is when we take action that the divine power partners with us to make the vision reality. Inspired action is the catalyst of miracles. Miracles are the work of God through us that exceeds our imagination.

There are potential miracles around us all of the time. Being aware of the Godly imperative for our moments and acting upon them is the veil between normalcy and active spiritual power. Michael Josephson is quoted saying, "The surest way to escape anxiety and defeat despair is action. Do, don't dwell."

If you dwell on the negative it will probably overwhelm you. Hence the next step in attacking loneliness.

### *4. Practice Optimism*

Lonely people tend to be pessimistic. Pessimissim is a companion to the thief of enthusiasm and the murderers, doubt and procrastination. It steals and kills potential, creativity, charisma and kinetic strength.

Optimism is a life-giving force. When people think of how rather than why not, things happen. The Wright brothers pondered the how of flight. Werner Von Braun pioneered rocket propulsion. Steve Jobs conceived of desktop computing. Industries have been created because people who knew how and where they received visions. They nurtured the vision with optimism, took action and repeated the cycle.

Optimism is connected to inventure, developing vision and action in a symbiotic synergy that creates more than the sum of the parts. It breaks the shackles of loneliness and opens a new freedom and experience that adds joy to life.

### *5. Exercise*

Exercise is important because loneliness slows down the life force. Many lonely people experience lethargy and consequently inertia. They don't want to move. They don't want to try anything new. They are sluggish and tired.

Brain chemistry changes when we are lonely and depressed. The facial and somatic affect is dour. Movement makes a difference. When I was in Chaplain's school at Newport, Rhode Island a Marine Corps Gunnery Sergeant told me that it is impossible to be depressed and move fast or lift heavy weights.

To ensure that his recruits were rarely depressed, he mandated wind sprints and weight lifting at least three times a week. If he saw one of us looking dour and homesick, we all did pushups. We became a very happy crew.

Exercise enervates the muscularity, which creates a concomitant effect on blood and brain chemistry. You feel and look better and stronger as a result of exercise. The brain works better also. If you are lonely and in fairly good health, run a few wind sprints or lift some weights. If you can't do anything else, go for a good walk. Don't slouch and drag, walk at a good pace. You will break the spine of loneliness.

### *6. Diet*

If there is any merit to the old adage that you are what you eat, have you thought about shifting away from meat to more of a plant-based diet?

If you are a hunter, you spend time in the blind or camouflaged so that the animal being hunted won't smell you and run. When the deer comes by it may not have sensed the presence of the hunter before the shot. This meat will not be full of fear hormones.

Conversely, think of the slaughter industry. When the trucks arrive at the slaughter houses the animals have an awareness of what has happened there and what will happen to them. Some try to escape but most are terrified. Imagine all of the natural hormones in their tissue that are not excreted or metabolized before slaughter.

As we ingest the meat, is it possible that we are ingesting stress, depression and fear from our food chain? If we are already demoralized and dispirited due to loneliness, might we be exacerbating our own imbalance? Better to eat life-giving food like fruits, vegetables, nuts and grains.

### *7. Service*

Service to others is a panacea or cure-all for people who are inward focused. Loneliness is abated when the lonely person focuses his intent and effort on someone else in need.

Sharing of one's self and resources creates a satisfying connection even if the service is done anonymously. Service turbo charges the inventure process because it adds dimension and depth to the story of your life.

Mahatma Ghandi is quoted saying "The best way to find yourself is to lose yourself in the service to others." Jesus said, "…Assuredly, I say unto you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me" (Matthew 25:40).

Getting involved and helping others is the work of God. Trouble and poverty can be dehumanizing. They mar the image of God. To the extent that we visit the sick, care for

the broken, wounded or dying, help the homeless, visit orphans and prisoners, we reinvest humanity in them. In so doing, we recapture our value and values.

The next time you feel lonely, ask the loneliness what message it is bringing. Is there a hole in the soul, an opportunity to grow in grace and favor with God? Perhaps it is time to expand your circle of friends and interests. Maybe, God is announcing His plan to move the cloud of His presence and blessings to another location. It gives you time to prepare.

Your loneliness may be a reminder that something has happened to disconnect you socially. It may be time to repair the breach or bridge the gulf. It may be frightening, but confrontation is far better than unnecessary isolation.

God may be using your loneliness to move you to a new level of diversity awareness and appreciation by exposing you to people you may not otherwise interact with. Be kind. Give a little more of yourself than you usually do.

The next time you help someone who is under the millstone of life, look them in their eyes and speak kindly. They do not see that very often because most people avert their gaze or avoid contact with them. Your look, your smile can be renewing to a person who has experienced soul erosion. No doubt they are lonely too.

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# A Message to Teens about Domestic Violence

*By Trafford Fischer and Paul Bogacs*

In this resource, Trafford Fischer interviews Paul Bogacs, a marriage and family therapist in Sydney, New South Wales, Australia. Paul is also a school counselor and has a keen interest in keeping young people heading in the right direction when it comes to relationships (he has two teenagers of his own!).

***Paul, I see a few advertisements on TV and street posters reminding me that Domestic Violence is under the spotlight. What do we mean by Domestic Violence?***

Domestic Violence (DV) is the term we use to describe a situation where one person in the relationship uses abuse and/or violence to control the other person/s through fear. The victim will feel threatened and may be too frightened to argue back, too scared to disagree or express their opinion. The perpetrator, the person doing the abusing, has power over the victim. In most cases of domestic and family violence the abuser is the male.

***But don't all families and couples have arguments; isn't that normal? What makes it Domestic Violence?***

Key words here are **fear, power** and **control**. DV is about using power to control another person through making them afraid. For example, when family members use terms such as, "I am always walking around on eggshells in my family" or "I would be scared of his reaction if I did that" this may well indicate the family is dealing with DV.

Another important way to identify DV is whether or not there is a victim and a perpetrator: somebody who uses fear to control another family member (or members) and somebody who is being controlled. Fear is used by the perpetrator to control his/her victim. Fear is created by giving looks or making gestures, possessing weapons (even if he doesn't use them), destroying property, being cruel to pets, or any behavior that leaves the victim feeling powerless.

Here are a few examples:

**Intimidation:** This includes smashing things, destroying possessions, hostile questioning, persistent and intrusive phone calls, abusive text messages or emails, or loitering near someone's home or place of work.

**Verbal Abuse:** This could include screaming, shouting, put-downs, name-calling or sarcasm.

**Physical Abuse:** This can range from a lack of consideration for a person's physical comfort to causing permanent injury and death; it could be pushing, shoving, hitting, slapping, choking, hair-pulling or destroying someone's prized possessions.

**Emotional Abuse:** This is about undermining the victim's confidence, leading him/her to think he/she is stupid, useless, a bad person or hopeless. It humiliates and degrades the victim.

**Social Abuse:** This is when the perpetrator isolates the victim from her friends and family by putting them down in front of others, or by abusing the victim in front of her family and friends.

**Economic Abuse:** This is about the perpetrator making the victim financially dependent on him. She may be denied access to money, or she may be forced to hand over her money so he can decide how it will be spent.

**Sexual Abuse:** This includes a range of unwanted sexual behaviors including forced sexual contact, rape, forcing her to perform sexual acts that cause pain or humiliation, forcing her to have sex with others, or any other unwanted sexual activity that is against her will.

**Spiritual Abuse:** This includes ridiculing his spiritual beliefs and customs, preventing him from attending church or other church-related activities, or controlling the way he contributes to his church in either time or finances.

**Stalking:** Stalking includes loitering around places she is known to frequent, watching her, following her, making persistent phone calls or other unwanted contacts with her, or sending her unwanted mail or gifts.

**Controlling behaviors:** These include dictating what he does, who he sees and talks to, where he goes, keeping him from seeing family and friends, not allowing him to express his own feelings and thoughts or opinions, or not allowing him any privacy.

***So it's not just about a husband hitting a wife or a boyfriend hitting a girlfriend?***

It certainly includes that, but it's not limited to that. There have been many people who have never been hit but who live in serious fear of their partner or parent.

***This is obviously serious information. What are some of the outcomes of this type of violence and abuse on girlfriends/boyfriends, partners and children?***

There is nothing more important to us than our relationships. Teens often try to pretend that their friends are more important to them than their parents. But as soon as something goes wrong, teens look to their parents to be there for them. Much of the information that teens talk to counselors about is in relationship to their parents. So when things get messed up in our families, we hurt.

One of the worst things that happens, especially if we are the victims of violence, is that we feel we aren't worth much. That belief can haunt us for the rest of our lives. We can also get the idea that the use of power, control and violence is the right and normal way to do relationships, and this can have serious repercussions when we start our own family.

***What about when two young people go out on a date? They're pretty much in love – is there a risk here for any trouble?***

Sadly a romantic date can end up badly if either person is the recipient of violent behavior. Some guys can get really possessive and extremely jealous when they see their girl talking with other guys. He will accuse her of flirting and could start restricting her movements and activities. He may then start using threats or become very passive and sullen and to control her through guilt. He may also start telling her what she should or shouldn't wear, do or not do. He may also put pressure on her to do physical stuff with him that she is not comfortable with. The extreme of that is what we call "date rape."

The important thing to remember is that it is NOT OK to be physically threatened or scared into doing something that makes you feel uncomfortable or unhappy just because you are in a relationship. It's NOT OK to be put down and pushed around. It is NOT OK for someone to use the excuse that they were tired, drunk, stressed, over-worked or under pressure as a reason for their violent behavior.

***What should a young person do if he or she feels they may be in a relationship with an abuser?***

Listen to your feelings and trust them. If something doesn't feel right it most probably isn't. Talk to someone who cares about you and you can trust. Make sure that at least one of the people you talk to is an adult. Don't allow any feelings of shame or embarrassment stop you from sharing with someone. Remember, you are not responsible for somebody else's violent behavior. Your first responsibility is to yourself, even though he is telling you the exact opposite! Get safe and stay safe.

Remember, abuse and violence is a crime. Intimidation and manipulation are not the basis of a sound relationship, and NO means NO!

## *Resources*

*The writers, Trafford Fischer and Paul Bogacs, are indebted to the material from the booklet published by the Australian Government Office for Women (www.australiasaysno.gov.au) and the Domestic Violence Prevention Centre, Gold Coast (www.domesticviolence.com.au).*

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## *STAY SAFE AND PLAY IT SAFE*

1. Plan to go out and hang out in a group. Go with people you feel safe with and who you know have your best interests at heart.
2. Look out for yourself and your friends – good friends make sure that their friends are safe and make safe choices.
3. Have some transport plans to make sure you can get there and back safely.
4. Let someone (parents, older sibling, reliable neighbor) know where you are going, and when you'll be home. If your plans change, let them know.
5. Agreeing to one type of activity (e.g., kissing) doesn't mean it's a green light for any other sexual contact – remember it's OK to change your mind and say NO at any stage.
6. You shouldn't stop being careful just because you think you know the person you are with – you may not know them as well as you think.
7. Don't be alone and isolated with someone you don't know well.
8. If you start to feel uncomfortable, get to a safe place as fast as you can. Make an excuse to leave and call somebody that you know can help you.

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# Parenting Teens in a Digital World

*By Pamela Consuegra*

Today's parents are dealing with issues that their own parents never had to face. Social media is a cultural change that did not enter our world until the end of the last century. Social media is not a passing fad. Instead, it is now the fabric of our American culture. As with many things, technology has proved to be both a blessing and a curse. In the last several months, we witnessed a nation's ruling party be overturned, due in part to the influence social media had upon its citizens. If it can impact a nation, it surely has an impact upon our families.

In a recent study, conducted by the Institute for Advanced Studies in Culture (2012), some startling information was revealed. The view that the family is in decline was largely shared by parents. This decline was attributed, to a large degree, to social media. Parents expressed a sense of danger to their child that was directly linked to the use of technology. Here are some of the findings revealed in the study:

- 84% of teenagers carry a cell phone.
- 93% of teenagers are connected to their peers via cell phone or social networking online.
- 7 out of 10 teenagers are texting at least once a day and 64% are texting multiple times daily.
- 4 out of 5 teenagers have a Twitter, Facebook or other social networking account where they follow and friend people whom their parents don't know.
- Two-thirds of teenagers connect to their online social networks at least several times a week.
- 62% of all parents of teenagers say that "my children are constantly connected electronically with their friends."

Another study gave us cause to believe that the situation is actually worse than parents report. It showed a disconnect between what parents perceptions were as compared with reality. A newly released study, The Online Generation Gap: Contrasting attitudes and behaviors of parents and teens, conducted by Hart Research Associates for the Family Online Safety Institute (FOSI) found a "generation gap" between what parents think they know about their kid's online behavior and what the teens say they actually know. In short, this study revealed that parents think they have a better handle on their child's online behavior than they actually do. This means that the problem may be worse than parents think it is. In fact, 71% of teens say they hide their online activity from their parents (Sass, 2012).

Our children's lives are infused with contacts, conversations and information that many parents feel are out of their control. Parents readily admit that their child sees things in media that they should not be seeing. Parents have a sense that they should, in fact, be doing more, however, they are uncertain as to how to get a handle on social media and the digital world that has invaded their child's life. Many parents feel as if their attempts to control the use of media are futile.

If parents try to envelop their child in a safety net against the influence of social media, they are left with nowhere for their child to go. After all, let's face the fact that social media is all around us. There is no escaping it. So, should parents just admit defeat? Do we throw our hands up in the air and give up?

A key role of parenting is to teach our children to be responsible adults. This is not a matter of control. This is a matter of living up to our God-given responsibility as parents. And, in so doing, we will help to assure their safety amidst social media frenzy. Here are some thoughts to consider:

### *Install Parental Control Software*

Teens should never have accounts that do not give you complete access to. Nothing should be a secret to you about their online activity. There is software available that you may install on all of your household computers which allows you to get a report of your child's online activity, and block gaming and pornography. You may want to consider "Net Nanny." It is the top rated parental control software available and it sells at a very affordable price.

### *Set Boundaries and Monitor Use of Technology*

Limit time on the computer and be sure the computer is located in the main part of the house. Allowing your child to have computers in their room may limit your ability to monitor their activity and screen habits. Be warned that this may not be a popular move and they won't like this, but that is okay. Remember, you have a responsibility as a parent to protect your child as well as to teach them responsibility and time management.

Spend some time considering what you value as a family. Some families have decided to ban the television from their homes completely, finding the merits of television to be limited. Other families have decided to control television usage and programming, again reflecting family values. This is also another area where internet access may now be gained directly from your television. Therefore, setting boundaries and monitoring use of it is vital.

Many teenagers can't seem to put their cell phone down. They walk with it, eat with it, and lie in bed at night talking on it. At times they seem more attached to talking or texting on their phones than talking to family or friends in person. Texting has gotten out of control at every age and it seems as if families can no longer enjoy a family meal in peace without texting or taking on the phone taking place throughout dinner. Establish ground rules for your family, adults included, so time to talk, share and listen are a normal part of your family's interactions. Set up 'no-texting' times and zones and be firm on this matter. Many have also made rules about putting cell phones away when they come into the home at night or at least limit the amount of time spent on them. Otherwise, technology will control your family instead of you controlling it.

### *Review All Social Media Accounts*

If you, as a parent, chose to allow your teenager to have a Facebook, Twitter or other social media accounts, you will need to monitor their activity. On a regular basis, at unannounced times, sit down with their teen on a monthly basis and go over entries on their Facebook and Twitter accounts. This will help you become familiar with where your teens are spending their time and who they are communicating with. You will learn a lot when you see photos, read stories and ask questions. Many parents would be shocked if they knew what their teens knew, saw, wrote, and read from their "friends."

### *Access to Social Media at Friends' Homes*

Many parents state that even if they control social media in their own home, their child is exposed to it at the home of their friends. Perhaps this is the easiest issue of all to solve. If this is an issue then don't allow the child to stay overnight or visit that friend's home unless you are along. It is not harsh and remember, you are the parent.

### *Model Responsible Behavior*

Perhaps the most important thing that you can do to get a handle on parenting in this digital world is to be a positive role model in the way that you use technology. Many teens are simply acting in ways that have been modeled for them by their parents. Too many parents operate their lives by, "Do as I say, not as I do." This is no way to effectively teach your children appropriate ways to utilize social media.

Parents, model moderation in your own use of the television, computer and cell phone. Model the observance of laws, including laws about the use of cell phones while driving. When your teen gets his/her driving license they will mimic the model that you have set. If you do not want your child doing it, writing it or watching it, then neither should you. We are counseled, "The words and acts of the parents are the most potent of educating influences, for they will surely be reflected in the character and conduct of the children" (White, 1889).

Many of the arguments as to how to handle social media place too much responsibility on the child for their own well-being and this is simply unfair and unhealthy. Children need to grow up with parents doing their job so they do not have to grow up too quickly. There needs to be a clear distinction as to who the parent is and who the child is. What is the role of each? In essence, the question for many families is one of who is in charge.

Technology is both a blessing and a curse to today's family. It has the potential to be a wonderful contribution to our children's lives if parents allow it to be a tool instead of a substitute for real relationships. Parents need to make sure they are setting boundaries, creating balance and teaching responsibility. By being intentional in our ever-changing digital world, parents may greatly reduce the likelihood of having regrets. After all, every parent wants to know they have done all they can do to raise healthy, well-adjusted children, not just for life here, but more importantly, for eternity.

We have a God-given responsibility to introduce our children to Jesus. There is no work more important. Everything they are exposed to should bring them closer to their Savior. Perhaps we should let scripture be our filter as we navigate through our digital world. "Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things" (Philippians 4:8).

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# Raise a Leader (God's Way)

*By Prudence LaBeach Pollard, Ph.D.*

*Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Association, 2012*
*122 pages*

*Reviewed by Tamanda Chanza*

The world is in need, more than ever before, of good leaders. There is a global hunger for leaders who possess not only ambition and dedication, but also integrity and humility. But where do we find such individuals? In her book, *Raise a Leader (God's Way)*, Dr. Prudence LaBeach Pollard gives insight on how to do precisely that. Dr. Pollard combines her years of experience as a parent, her expertise in leadership, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit to provide parents with the perfect recipe for teaching their children to become influential members of society, God's way.

Throughout the book, the author focuses on parental responsibility, supportive relationships, healthy communication, clearly defined boundaries, genuine self-esteem, character development and Christ centered values. Dr. Pollard clearly and concisely uses intriguing stories, past and present data, personal experiences and the Word of God to guide parents on what they need to do and how to do it. In every instance, readers are encouraged not only to teach their children good practices, but also exhibit those same attributes that they are trying to instill.

The five stages of development discussed in the book provide parents with insight to how their little one is changing and what must be done at every step along the way. While there are certain things that parents can expect during development, Dr. Pollard reminds readers that each child is unique and that rather than stifling individuality, parents should focus on developing their child's personality as a resource for Christ; "it is the means through which we are to bring glory to God."

When I began reading this book, I wondered how I, a single young woman with no children, would benefit from it. I was pleasantly surprised to see that the information was not only applicable to parents with young children, but to young adults as well. As people on the precipice of becoming today's leaders, this book shows young adults what changes can be made in our lives even now to become the leaders God desires us to be. This book is an easy, informative read with practical

applications that add potency. I encourage everyone, parent or not, to pick up a copy and learn from the wealth of knowledge and spiritual guidance found in these pages.

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# The Intimate Marriage

*By Alberta Mazart*
*Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald Association, 2001*
*140 pages*

*Reviewed by Angela Brown*

Many young couples see their wedding day as the beginning of a wonderful life together, when they will continue to grow closer and more in love every day. But like many couples have experienced firsthand, as the years begin to pass quickly, they continue as well-functioning partners, focusing more on their daily tasks than each other. Children, work, cleaning, church activities, extended family, friends, preparing meals and the list of things goes on leaving less time and energy to dedicate to their spouse.

In her book, *The Intimate Marriage*, Dr. Alberta Mazat takes you not only through the complexity of relationships but on a deeper, introspective and interactive journey into your own relationship. Throughout each chapter she gives opportunities to reflect with your spouse on your own experience and apply the theory taught at a practical level. *The Intimate Marriage* is not only a book about marriage but rather gives the experience of a self-directed marriage seminar for couples that wish to be more than simply functional and achieve deeper intimacy. This is a helpful resource intended to be read together as a couple in order to help maintain your intimacy, reconnect and protect against future problems.

The author provides an in-depth look at ways to strengthen and develop emotional, intellectual, sexual and spiritual intimacy in your relationship. For each of these ingredients of intimacy, we are informed about the theory behind it, the importance it plays in every marriage, Biblical examples, practical steps to work toward it, realistic ways to connect and the opportunity to dialogue about the state of each aspect in your relationship. Dr. Mazart reminds us "…even though marriage provides the very best setting, intimacy is not the automatic, instantaneous, mystical result of marriage. It is the by-product of love, understanding, knowledge, and time" (p. 18).

*The Intimate Marriage* is filled with stories, conversations, situations and experiences that many of us can relate to from our own lives. But this book goes even farther. Unlike many mainstream relationship books, it does not rely solely on experience, case studies and relationship theory. In addition, Dr. Mazat also draws heavily on powerful wisdom from the Bible primarily as well as the writings of spiritual leaders, such as Ellen White.

The importance of this book extends far beyond couples in crisis or who have reached an unhealthy level of apathy toward each other. This book also serves couples at any stage of their marriage and those who are functioning well but may just need to be more intentional in one or more aspects of intimacy in their relationship. Reading and discussing this book together, as encouraged by the author, is time well spent together. It teaches many fundamental lessons and opens the doors for honest, meaningful communication.

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# Maximizing Marital and Parental Satisfaction in Pastoral Couples

*By Curtis A. Fox*

The call to pastoral ministry can be one of the most fulfilling and rewarding experiences that any person can have. But, this same calling can be very challenging and dangerous as well. Specifically, the life of a minister could have significant negative effects on his or her personal life, marriage, and family life. This may not be new light, but the helplessness that stalks many ministers as they attempt to evade the landmines around their marriage and families leave many bruised or maimed.

So as to avoid a pessimistic view, I must pause to rejoice with generations of pastors that have shared in this blessed work for the salvation of souls, leadership in the body of Christ, and in the empowerment of the people of God for life and service. Many such men and women have baptized in the name of Christ, dedicated children to God, buried saints that have fallen asleep in Jesus, encouraged many who were discouraged, performed weddings of gleeful couples, challenged young people to live for Christ, preached passionate sermons, and more, yea, far more. Pastoral ministry is an awesome vocation. Can there be any downside to such a noble calling? Can there be any pitfalls in doing it? I answer Yes—many!

A few years ago, I had the opportunity to study clergy families, and I found this to be fascinating. Many clergy families share five major stressors in common: mobility, low financial compensation, high time demands, low social support, and intrusiveness to the boundaries of the family.

In many denominations, clergy and their families are moved from one congregation to another (and often from one homestead to another to be nearer to their congregations). These moves involve uprooting from familiar surroundings, social networks, friendships, and social institutions that aid in their survival and well-being. Children and spouses may have to separate from work and school to allow a peaceful transition.

With regard to compensation, ministers, in some parts of the world, have been known to have lower levels of remuneration compared to other professions. While in the top ten with regard to educational attainment, clergy are very low on the scale with regard to salary; in fact, they rank 325th among 432 occupations. The minister's calling often assumes a vow of poverty. This call that demands a certain lifestyle appears to be inconsistent with the minister's ability to sustain it financially. For that reason, the family is prone to financial strains that have serious implications for marital satisfaction and stability as well as family distress.[1]

Time demands have been noted as a big challenge for ministers. As he or she attempts to share the resource of time with his or her family, the congregation, and the larger church organization, there is often a pull in too many directions and some things get left out or unattended. Too often, the family gets neglected. The effect of working on call 24 hours a day is grossly underestimated. This can be the perfect setup for sapping the physical, emotional, and spiritual constitution of ministers, and robbing their marriages of the vitality that can only be sustained with the investment of quality time and energy. The public and private failures of pastors testify in part to the harrowing time demands of ministry.

Social support is a crucial issue for pastors as well. One of the more subtle deceptions of ministry is the belief that because pastors are doing people work and are always around people that their social needs are met. To be sure, the reality of ministry is often counterintuitive to social need-satisfaction. If meeting social needs involves having interactions characterized by openness, challenge, accountability, and abiding reciprocal friendships, then I proffer that ministry, as practiced, does not allow for such interactions between the minister and the congregants or with others.

One characteristic of ministry is referred to as "antifraternalization norms."[2] This norm adopted by ministers in their congregations disallows them from having nurturing friendships. Often, in interactions with congregants, the minister "befriends" but does not enjoy being befriended. The relationships go one way and so the emotional needs of the minister and family are not met in those contexts usually. Another related characteristic of ministry is referred to as "pedestal effects." Often, the minister is elevated by his or her congregants and then set apart from common human experience. Admittedly, the minister values and seeks that elevation and, thus, does not experience many nurturing relationships in the congregation. Even entering into a therapeutic relationship for an emotional or family problem has been shown to be threatening to many ministers. Finally, the line that separates the minister from his or her work is, at best, often blurred. The minister and family are "owned by the people" and enjoy little physical and emotional space to live a personal life unfettered by the constraints, expectations, demands, and judgments on self, spouse, and children. That intrusion into their private space can have serious effects on the minister and family. Living in a glass house can create a debilitating hypervigilance that keeps the minister on red alert status, which is wearing on the soul.

1 D. Mace and V. Mace, What's Happening to Clergy Families? (Nashville, TN: Abingdon, 1982).
2 T. Blackbird and P. Wright, "Pastor's Friendships, Part 1: Project Overview and an Exploration of the Pedestal Effect," Journal of Psychology and Theology 13 (1985): 274–283.

My empirical attempt to test the effects of these five common stressors on the marital satisfaction, parental satisfaction, and life satisfaction of male clergy and their female spouses illuminated the issues at hand. When the factors of mobility, compensation, time demands, lack of social support, and intrusiveness to the boundaries of the family were placed in a statistical model, it showed that these clergy stress factors influenced the marital satisfaction, parental satisfaction, and life satisfaction of clergy and their spouses. On closer observation, intrusiveness to the boundaries of the family appeared to be the only unique predictor of the marital satisfaction of clergy and their spouses. Also, social support was the only unique predictor of life satisfaction for them.

For the rest of this article, I will raise some issues that may be addressed by clergy, their families, and the church administrators to aid in maximizing their marital and parental satisfaction.

By this, I am implying that clergy have to take personal responsibility for managing some of these issues to achieve positive ends. In addition, the family must engage in protectionist measures to ensure that their boundaries are not compromised as well as manage the other stressors they face. Also, church administrators in the higher organizations must play their role in enacting policies and procedures that minimize the negative and disparate impacts on clergy and their families.

## *Understanding the pastoral ecology*

In the training of men and women for ministry, I suspect too little is discussed about the larger systemic pull in ministerial life that can be potential for personal and family destabilization. A system exists that tricks and seduces us into thinking that helping others is most crucial, and is more important than self-care and family nurture. I know what you may be thinking: That has not happened to me and, indeed, never will. If so, I thank you for illustrating the point that I am trying to make. We are so very unaware of it. We can go on to talk about the conundrum of invulnerability; suspicion about relationships; guilt about not working more; identity based on doing rather than being; and perpetuation of the myth of perfection in life, work, and family. These are system issues and they all have a bearing on marriages and families in that context.

If anything would change for the clergy and family, there has to be a conscientious theology of self-care and family care. Otherwise, we will struggle eternally with the same issues of neglect of self and family that brings disastrous consequences to our lives, health, and our emotional and family's well-being. That is not the calling from God. Rather, the calling includes modeling self-care and family nurture among other things, and demonstrating how to hold the truth of God "in earthen vessels" as we live in the real world. Perfectly? Never. But the struggle is itself the greater testimony of God's strength made perfect in human weakness.

### *The pastor's responsibility in shaping the pastoral ecology*

There are some models of ministerial life that make clergy work a hostile environment for the thriving of marriages and families. The minister who holds himself or herself aloof from the people and portrays a superhuman and invulnerable self among them will not enjoy mutually nurturing relationships and will suffer isolation and loneliness among other things, even while working among scores of people on a regular basis. I propose that the chief executive officer (CEO) model of pastoral leadership is not apropos. The minister is not the CEO of a corporation but one person, placed among other people to teach and model the will of God. The pastoral relationship is more one of friendship with the people of the congregation, which allows for building an authentic community. In that authentic community, pastors and spouses can live and grow with other couples, encouraging, supporting, and challenging one another on this journey called life.

I imagine that a swift retort to the foregoing idea would be that those friendships should be found elsewhere and/or with their peers. Conversations between pastors are not usually about the emotional nurture of each other. I believe that if ministry is done as Jesus did it, some of the present challenges would abate or become more manageable. Jesus mingled among men and women during His ministry and derided the walls of partition and hypocrisy that separated the intellectual scribes and philosophical Sadducees from "common people." The lack of nurturing social support has significant implications for marital and parental nurture. A marriage needs community as this kind of partnership needs time alone to flourish. This can happen for clergy in their congregation. Children may enjoy the pedestal for a moment, but they soon begin to revolt against the pressure of the glass bowl. With appropriate boundaries, this model suggested can serve great ends.

### *A challenge to spouses*

To challenge ministers' spouses and families to take some personal responsibility for marital and parental satisfaction can be difficult. Many spouses of clergy feel like it is sacrilege to challenge the involvement of the minister in his or her calling and demand from them greater participation in family life. "How dare I do such a thing?" is a sure and certain question that flies in the face of any such challenge. Then, that is part of the problem, more than the solution. Because the minister's calling is deemed untouchable (the "pedestal effect"), often spouses suffer in silence and slowly develop negative attitudes toward ministry and the God of the ministry, sometimes slipping into cynicism and hate for the calling and those associated with it.

As an unknown author said: "if you do what you've always done, you will get what you've always gotten." I cannot blame any here, but many spouses need to be coached to stand up to the ecological forces against their homes and family lives and help the minister to draw the boundary line so as to preserve the integrity of their marital and parental relationships. He or she would need to view the minister as a very real person with proclivities common to humans, and who does need that challenge all too often. Doing so may set the tone for the rest of their joyful years together.

Ministers need to reflect deeply on their own issues and philosophy regarding the intrusion to the boundaries of the family as well, and spend enough time and energy doing so until they win the victory. In one sense, clergy may have the best schedule among other professions, but this issue is not always paramount. The clergy, as well as the spouse, has to make family boundaries a priority or family nurture will slip into the background. Our own children can be neglected while we visit others faithfully. The younger generation of clergy and spouses need to know that they must start positive habits earlier rather than later.

### *Church administrators have a role to play*

In some fellowships, clergy mobility seems inevitable. I am not opposed to shuffling the ministerial crew to build up the work in various places. In my own experience, I accepted each move as a calling, and I was ready for my marching orders. In reflection, I think that too often the moves are made with too little regard for the challenges and possible disruptions to the personal, family, and congregational equilibrium. The minister's spouse hardly receives consideration, let alone is consulted when moves are being made. These moves may affect emotional connections, job tenure, educational plans for the spouse and children, and the spouse's own ministry, to name just a few issues. Often, a disconnect between the minister and his or her spouse occurs as well. A move may have a totally different meaning for the pastor. For example, the pastor may be relieved by the opportunity to recycle skills and sermons in another location, to move away from a problem church, to be "promoted" to a larger or more established congregation; none of which may have anything to do with the spouse.

Church officials may serve a greater good by considering the needs of the whole family in such moves, work to create shared meaning with the nonclergy spouse, and be intentional in aiding in the spouse's adjustment to the new environment. While moving the clergy may be inevitable, at the very least, the move may be more bearable for the spouse knowing that he or she has received consideration. In addition, church administrators can be more intentional in organizing financial compensation, policies, and direct challenges to their clergy to be more present at home in order to help shape a better ecology in which family life can thrive.

Recently, while sitting with a group of ministers talking about the challenges of ministry to family well-being, I heard one minister, married for a few years, saying almost gleefully, "I have never sat with my wife in church since being married." Whatever else is true, his experience expressed a culture of ministry that suggests that the people in the congregation come first and that one should not cloud up one's mind with thoughts of the needs and comforts of a spouse when doing ministry. On the other hand, if you poll spouses regarding their views of ministry and the emotional impact it has on them any day, including the Sabbath, the revelation is mostly consistent. Slowly, but surely, many of them come to despise the thing that removes their clergy spouse so far from them, thus reducing them to microscopic insignificance in ministry. You need a lot of grit to row against this tide and create a richer experience born out of valuing, respecting, and honoring the family, and seeing as an enemy anything that stands against giving them the best place in heart and affection, even while doing ministry, loving the people of God, and working with and for them.

## *Conclusion*

I close with some advice to pastoral couples.

1. Prioritize your life and work to ensure that your spouse and family get your best time and energy. Build beautiful memories in special places, doing wonderful things together. Also, let the moments at church be special for your spouse and children. Your congregation might be thrilled to see you sit with your spouse or family while at church. They may forget your sermon but not that.
2. Learn financial management skills from all the right places and people, and practice those skills to avoid financial distress.
3. Create a culture of vulnerability around you rather than invulnerability. Be real. Talk about your desire and struggle to be the best spouse or parent you can be. Ask for the prayers of your congregants and promise them yours.
4. The spouses of ministers should develop identities of their own. They should become involved in their own calling rather than depend on the church to provide one for them. This will help to insulate them from some of the negative effects of church life.
5. Use nurturing friendships well. The social needs we have are to be met. Such friendships affect the soul and keep us buoyed up. This may even reduce some dependency on one's spouse and change the dynamics of the marriage. In addition, establish a great friendship with your spouse.
6. Establish healthy boundaries around your marriage. Use time that is not work time, and resist intrusions into your private space.
7. Avoid taking each other for granted. That is so very easy to do. Be attuned to communication from each other, and provide space to listen and observe. Marriage and family are wonderful gifts. Appreciate the gifts, and practice stewardship of your family. The dividends are out of this world.

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# Securing Christian Marriage and Family: Helpful Resources for Pastors

*By Claudio Consuegra*

Ministry to couples and families composes a significant part of pastoral work. Most pastors spend a great deal of time dealing with interpersonal issues and family concerns among their congregants, indeed, more time than in dealing with theological or administrative issues. And yet many pastors lack adequate training or skills to help their members face challenges in marriage and family relationships. The purpose of this article is to provide resources that will assist pastors in their ministry to families.

## *Preparation*

To begin with, pastors need to know how to help couples planning to get married so that they understand what it takes to make a happy marriage. For many years, the North American Division's Department of Family Ministries has encouraged pastors to be trained in the PREPARE/ENRICH program. Once trained, the pastor can lead premarital couples in a marriage-preparation program (PREPARE), and help married couples to enrich and improve their relationships (ENRICH). For information on training and resources, visit www.prepare-enrich.com.

In my premarital counseling experience, I found several informative and useful books. *The Adventist Home* by Ellen G. White is a good starter. While the book is a compilation, and therefore challenging for some to read, it is packed with practical advice for couples contemplating marriage as well as for those already married. *Preparing for Marriage*, edited by Dennis Rainey, is a hands-on workbook for premarital couples. To help you sharpen your premarital counseling skills, here are other helpful books: *The Premarital Counseling*

*Handbook* by Christian psychologist H. Norman Wright; *Counseling Couples in Conflict* by Mark Yarhouse and James Sells; and *Marriage Counseling* by Everett Worthington.

In premarital counseling, I usually require the couple to read several books, such as *So You're Getting Married* by H. Norman Wright, and *Fit to Be Tied* by Bill and Lynne Hybels. In addition, I recommend books on sexuality, such as *Captivated by Love* by Alberta Mazat, *A Celebration of Sex* by Douglas Rosenau, *Intended for Pleasure* by Ed and Gayle Wheat, *The Gift of Sex* by Clifford and Joyce Penner, and *Sex Begins in the Kitchen* by Kevin Leman. These books give a Christian perspective on sex within marriage and provide helpful information on sexual intimacy for those preparing for marriage as well as those who are already married who may be facing challenges in this area of their relationship.

## *Marriage: Beginning and early years*

David Olson, author of the PREPARE/ENRICH program, cowrote the book *Empowering Couples*, which includes a number of quizzes and exercises to assess the condition of a couple's marital relationship and to help them in those areas that need strengthening. Another resource from PREPARE/ENRICH is *The Couple Checkup*, which includes an online scoring questionnaire that a couple can take as an inventory of their relationship.[1] Other books I have found helpful are *The First Year of Marriage* by Miriam Arond, and *Why Marriages Succeed or Fail* by John Gottman. Mark Gungor's *Laugh Your Way to a Better Marriage* is also a good source for understanding those early problems in marital life, and it comes with a video series that provides practical information for couples in a very humorous way. However, some of your more conservative members may not be comfortable with a few of Gungor's illustrations and so you may want to view the series first. The series, priced fairly inexpensive, can also be purchased in a group version.

## *Growing family*

A successful marriage, like a good garden, requires adequate cultivation and pruning. To deal with habits, behaviors, or negative feelings that rob true intimacy from marriage, and to provide one-on-one counseling and help, the North American Division has established a Family Ministries Web site with a list of Adventist counselors. To visit, go to www.adventistfamilyministries.com/article/70/resources/directory-of-counselors. The Kettering Health Network provides confidential counseling to clergy and others at www.ketteringhealth.org/counseling/. The American Association of Christian Counselors also provides a list of counselors on their Web site at www.aacc.net/resources/find-a-counselor/.

As the family grows, there comes a time when pastors and church members reach or experience an empty-nest syndrome known as the time when children leave home for college, marriage, or simply for independence. This could be a critical time for marital relations. David Arp's *Empty Nesting* guides through these challenging changes for middle-aged couples.

1 Visit the Web site www.couplecheckup.com for more information. Couples will receive a report based on their answers, along with a discussion guide on proven relationship skills. There is a fee involved

At some point, the unthinkable happens: a couple considers divorce. Before people plunge into this marriage-ending option, pastors can use, in their counseling process, the excellent DVD program *Choosing Wisely: Before You Divorce*. A very practical resource for those who have lost a spouse to death or divorce is *Living Life After Divorce & Widowhood: Financial Planning, Skills, and Strategies for When the Unthinkable Happens* by Maurcia DeLean Houck. These resource guides outline steps to be taken in case of a terminal illness and after the death of a spouse, so the death will not have devastating financial consequences. "Dealing With Divorce" from Seminars Unlimited is a seminar that can be used as a group program for the church and community or to help individuals going through this painful transition in their lives.

Some people will choose, or have the opportunity, to marry again. Two resources can prove very helpful to them. *The Remarriage Checkup* by David Olson and Ron Deal includes an online scoring questionnaire and helps the couple deal with issues that may have affected previous relationships, thus preventing recurrences. For individuals who have children and are contemplating entering marriage and forming a blended family, Ron Deal's *The Smart Step-Family* is a valuable resource.

One of the growing problems facing families today is pornography. There are several resources that can assist in dealing with this threat to a successful and happy married life. Douglas Weiss, a Christian counselor and national leader in the field of sexual addiction, has written several books on the issue of intimacy and pornography. I recommend *The Final Freedom: Pioneering Sexual Addiction Recovery; Intimacy Anorexia: The Hidden Addiction in Your Marriage*; and for children of sexual addicts, *Beyond the Bedroom: Healing for Adult Children of Sex Addicts*. Pat Springle's *Freedom Begins Here* combines a devotional with a DVD program that can help those struggling with pornography.[2]

## *Parenting*

The experience of parenting can be the most fulfilling and exciting but also the most challenging to a couple and their marriage. Just as adequate premarital preparation can be very beneficial for a successful marriage, pre-parenting preparation can help make this experience less stressful and more joyful. One of the premier books on parenting is *Child Guidance* by Ellen G. White. As with *The Adventist Home*, this is also a compilation and contains very valuable insights on parenting from a biblical point of view. Kay Kuzma's *The First 7 Years*, Sally Hohnberger's *Parenting by the Spirit*, and George Barna's *Transforming Children Into Spiritual Champions* are very insightful books relating to spiritual parenting. To help prepare children ages 8–12 for baptism, my wife and I wrote the book *Making Jesus My Best Friend* (also available in Spanish).

2 For more information, contact Advent*Source* at their Web site: www.adventsource.org

Several other resources can be very helpful for parents:

**Web sites**

- North American Division
  Children's Ministries:
  www.childmin.com/eng/index.php
- North American Division Family Ministries (Parenting):
  www.helpimaparent.com
- Young Child Ministries:
  www.youngchildministries.com

**E-Newsletters**

- Adventist Parenting E-newsletter:
  www.adventistparenting.org

**Parenting blog**

- http://rarekidswelldone.com/blog/

## *When death comes*

Ministry puts pastors at the center of the lives of their church members. One crucial moment calling for pastoral concern is during a terminal illness or death, and pastors need to be well prepared to be of spiritual and supportive sustenance to the families involved. During my ten years as a hospice chaplain, I recommended to the families of patients the book *Final Gifts* by Maggie Callanan and Patricia Kelley. Although their theology may be at variance with yours, the insights these hospice nurses offer on ministry to those going through such difficulties are quite helpful. Two other books also provide valuable insights: Elisabeth Kubler-Ross's classic book on the stages of the dying process, *On Death and Dying*, is very enlightening and can help us understand why those who have been diagnosed with a serious and, in particular, terminal disease act or react the way they do as the disease progresses. Another classic reading on the subject of death and tragedy is Rabbi Harold Kushner's *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. Writing from his own experience after the death of his son from the rare genetic condition known as progeria—rapid aging in children—Kushner does not offer an answer to why bad things happen but rather a positive option when bad things happen.

In dealing with death, two books have proved particularly helpful as I help people through their journey of grief, bereavement, and recovery: *Grief Recovery* by Larry Yeagley, and *Beyond Grief* by Carol Staudacher.

## *Toward happy families*

Good marriages and healthy families are not accidents or happenstance. American entrepreneur, author, and motivational speaker Jim Rohn once said, "Your family and your love must be cultivated like a garden. Time, effort, and imagination must be summoned constantly to keep any relationship flourishing and growing."

As pastors, we have the distinct honor and privilege to help the families in our churches live out heaven on earth. Sometimes teaching families a simple skill, helping them look at their relationships from a different point of view, suggesting materials to read, or walking with them through some of the difficult times in their lives can make a world of difference to them. The most important thing we can do is to make sure our own marriages are healthy and strong and our family relations are positive, even if not perfect. Then we can move on to helping the families in our church and community, and we can move on—in the strength of God and our own healthy family relationships!

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# Prayers for Kids That Get Answered

*By Willie and Elaine Oliver*

**Q** – Last year my son was arrested; my daughter is disrespectful to her dad and me and doesn't seem to be interested in church or God. I pray constantly for my kids, and yet sometimes I wonder if God hears my prayers. I feel so hurt and hopeless as I see my kids drifting away from the ways we taught them and from God. I can't help but wonder does God really hear and answer prayers?

**A** – As parents ourselves, we are touched personally by your question. Each day, we pray pleading on behalf of our children for God to protect them and save them in His kingdom. We want to assure you that God hears and answers prayers (Matthew 7:7).

There are many reasons why people, especially parents, question the effectiveness of their prayers. These reasons may include guilt, fear, helplessness, and hopelessness. We might admit that when our kids don't turn out the way we raised them, we somehow feel that perhaps God is punishing us for something we did, or something we didn't do right with them. That guilt leads to worshipping God out of fear instead of a true and honest relationship with our heavenly father.

The wonderful thing about God is that He is Love! He loves us "with an everlasting love" (Jeremiah 31:3). We are also reminded in 1 John 4:18: "There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love." Don't allow guilt, fear, and anxiety about punishment to cripple you as a parent.

God is a loving parent who longs for us to enter into deep and real relationship with Him. He wants us to understand who He is as a parent, so we can then know how to parent our children. He definitely knows first hand what it is like to see a child in anguish and pain. He sent His own son to earth as a human being to experience pain and suffering on our behalf (John 3:16). Jesus reacted much the same as we do when He asked three times if there was

another way. He also displayed a sense of human abandonment when He exclaimed: "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34).

Perhaps, our difficulty with praying is that we can accept God's "Yes," but we have difficulty with His "No" or His "Wait". One way to learn how to accept the negative or wait answers is to keep record of all the positive answers we've received. Has God been good to you? Has he answered any of your prayers? Can you think of any blessings you have received from him? Do you have any thing to be thankful for?

God's promises are true! He is faithful! Memorize His promises such as Philippians 4:6,7: "Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made know to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

God wants us to cry out to Him daily. When we pray, our prayers should not only be filled with demands but with praise and thanksgiving. The more we praise, the more we are reminded of God's love, grace, and mercy. Ours prayers do make a difference; praying not only changes our circumstances, but most important, praying changes us. Prayer draws us closer to God, so "*pray without ceasing*" (1 Thessalonians 5:17). The closer we draw to God, the more we are convicted that He indeed hears and answers our prayers everyday and always.

Ultimately, your children will have to choose for themselves to live by the values you taught them. Keep praying for them, trusting God to reveal Himself to them. Hopefully they will choose to follow God, but no matter how they choose, continue to love your children unconditionally, like God loves us.

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*From **Oliver, W.** and **Oliver, E.** (2013, March/April). Message 79 (2) p. 16. Used by permission.*

# The New Conversation About Race

*By Willie and Elaine Oliver*

**Q** – My husband and I are concerned about how to approach the topic of race and racism with our children. As African American Christian parents of boys who are eight and 10 years of age, my husband and I want to be sure our boys understand clearly our need to love everyone. At the same time, our country has had a violent history of racism that has not altogether disappeared despite the election of an African American as president of the United States. We want to be sure our boys have a strong self-esteem and identity without hating anyone because of their ethnicity or national origin. Do you have any counsel for us?

*Cynthia—Stamford, Connecticut*

**A** – One of the most challenging jobs any human being will have to do is that of parenting children to be positive and productive members in the family, society and the church. Parents are the key to whether the next generation will contribute to the public discourse and behavior in civil society.

The issues of race and racism are among the most difficult values to communicate about with our children because they are so filled with pain and even feelings of hatred for many of us as people of color. The truth is unless we have come to grips with the issues of race and racism for ourselves, we will not be able to pass on a healthy perspective to our children.

Racism, according to Dictionary.com, is: "a belief or doctrine that inherent differences among the various human races determine cultural or individual achievement, usually involving the idea that one's own race is superior and has the right to rule others."

When we looked for the definition of *race* in Dictionary.com, other than referring to the concept of "a contest of speed, as in running, riding, driving, or sailing," there was no other notion that denotes the issue we are dealing with. In Wikipanion, however, we found the

following definition: "Race and ethnicity in the United States Census as defined by the Federal Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the United States Census Bureau are self-identification data items in which residents choose the race or races with which they most closely identify, and indicate whether or not they are of Hispanic or Latino origin (ethnicity)."

The social sciences usually define race as 'socially-constructed.' In other words, it is a concept made up by human beings to classify and determine differences between peoples. After all, it is very difficult today to find someone in American society who is 100 percent of any racial group.

The Bible text that seems most applicable in this context is Matthew 10:16 that states: "Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore *be wise as serpents and harmless as doves*."

The truth is, as people of God, our behavior and the way we raise our children need to be compatible with the Biblical ethic of loving our neighbors as we love ourselves. The way we talk about others in the privacy of our homes will be manifested in public by the way our children behave when we least expect it.

We hope that *from this day forward* you will trust God to help you live right no matter the response of others. You and your family will continue in our prayers.

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*From* ***Oliver, W.*** and ***Oliver, E.*** *(2013, January/February). Message 79 (1) p. 9. Used by permission.*

# Appendix A
# Family Ministries Implementation

***Policy and Purpose Statement***

***The Family Ministries Leader***

***What is a Family?***

***Committee and Planning Guidelines***

***A Good Presentation Will Do Four Things***

***The Ten Commandments of Presentations***

***Family Ministries Interest Survey***

Note: Some of the recommendations listed in these forms will need to be adapted and modified to the specific needs and laws of the territories in which this resource is to be used.

# 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: http://childmin.com/files/docs/VolMinScreeningForm.pdf). References must be obtained from potential volunteers. Appropriate personnel or staff must check those references. Other divisions are encouraged to follow this procedure.
- All workers with children should observe the "two person" rule, which means that workers must avoid one-on-one situations with children whenever possible.
- Adult survivors of childhood physical or sexual abuse need the love and acceptance of the church family. Individuals with such a history must discuss their desire to work with children and youth with one of the staff in a confidential interview prior to receiving approval to work in these areas.
- Individuals who have committed physical or sexual abuse, whether or not convicted, may not work in church –sponsored activities or programs for children or youth.
- Opportunities for training in prevention and recognition of child abuse will be provided by the church. Workers will be expected to participate in such training.
- Workers should immediately report to the pastor or administration any behaviors or other incidents that seem abusive or inappropriate. Upon notification, appropriate actions will be taken and reports made in compliance with the operating procedure of these policies.
- Guidelines for volunteers who work with your and children will be provided to each volunteer.
- Children shall not be allowed to roam around the church without adult supervision. Parents are responsible for supervising their children before and after Sabbath School.
- No child should be released to use the restroom unless accompanied by a parent or older sibling.

- A responsible adult shall be designated to circulate in and around the church, including parking areas to provide security. This is critical when only one adult is present at some activities for minors, such as a Sabbath School division.
- Any discipline shall occur within the visual contact of another adult. All forms of corporal punishment are strictly prohibited.
- All meetings for children or youth must have the approval of the pastor and/or church board, especially overnight activities. Minors must have signed parental permission for each trip, including emergency medical treatment release.
- It 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.

*Taken from Family Ministries Southeastern California Conference 2002*

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# The Family Ministries Leader

The family ministries leader designs a ministry to families that will meet the specific needs of the congregation and community. This section provides planning support for family ministries leaders. Planning is critical for ministering to the individuals and families in the congregation. Family ministries is also an excellent way to reach out to families in the community. The family ministries leader is a member of the local church board and integrates family ministries activities to the whole church program. Listed below are responsibilities and activities.

1. Develop and chair a small family ministries committee that reflects the distinctiveness of the congregation. It may include a single parent, young married persons, mid-life families, retired, widowed or divorced persons. People who serve on this committee should be carefully chosen as visionary people reflecting the grace of God.
2. Be a family advocate. Family ministries is not merely program-oriented, but must look at the whole church program with sensitivity to its impact on families. In some situations the family ministries leader may need to advocate for family time. In other words, there may be so many programs going on in a congregation that people have little time to live their own lives as families.
3. Survey family needs and interests in the congregation. The needs assessment survey and family profile sheet may be used to help determine the needs of the congregation.
4. Plan programs and activities for the year that may include video presentations, retreats or special speakers who present workshops and seminars. Plans should also include simple activities that may be suggested to families through the church bulletin or newsletter.
5. Work with the pastor and church board to be sure plans are included in the local church budget.
6. Make use of the resources available from the conference family ministries department. These can save time, energy and serve to keep costs down for the local congregation. When planning for special presentations, the conference family ministries director is able to assist in finding interesting and qualified presenters.
7. Communicate with the congregation. Family ministries should not be perceived simply as an annual event. Keep the importance of good family skills alive by use of posters, the church newsletter and/or bulletin throughout the year.
8. Share your plans with the conference family ministries director.

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# 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?

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# 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.

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# A Good Presentation Will Do Four Things

1. **Inform** – People should learn something they did not know prior to attending your presentation.

2. **Entertain** – People deserve not to be bored!!!

3. **Touch the Emotions** – Information that only informs the head never makes a change in attitude or behavior.

4. **Move to Action** – If participants leave your presentation without a desire to DO something different –you have wasted your time and theirs!

### *Handouts*

- Distribute only when they are relevant to the presentation.
- Sometimes it's best not to distribute handouts until the end of the meeting: the audience shouldn't be rustling papers while you are speaking.
- Your audience should not read ahead and tune you out.
- Don't just copy someone else's presentation for your handouts.

### *Introduction*

- Find out who will introduce you.
- Write your own introduction.
- Contact the person at least two days before and give them the introduction.
- Pronounce any unusual words– check accuracy of all information.
- Don't make assertions that are not true.

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# The Ten Commandments of Presentations

1. **Know Thyself** – Body language and tone of voice make up 93% of your credibility. Would you be interested in you?

2. **Be prepared** – Know your presentation, your equipment and be ready for mishaps. Projectors always blow bulbs in the midst of important presentations so keep a spare, and know how to change it.

3. **Examine Your Speech** – Use direct expressions, and don't seek to impress– you're there to communicate.

4. **Arrive Early** – Your guests might be waiting. Be there at least a half hour before the presentation to make certain that everything is set up the way you want it to be.

5. **Tell Them What to Expect** – Tell the meeting attendees specifically what they will learn in the course of the meeting and how they will be able to apply their new knowledge. Clear goals keep attendees focused on their own responsibilities as active participants.

6. **Less Is More** –Your audience can only take so much, so limit your main points. Seven main points is roughly the maximum your audience can take in and fully contain.

7. **Keep Eye Contact** – Use note cards instead of a completely scripted speech, so you can look up and keep eye contact with your audience. Avoid the urge to READ a presentation. Your audience response will be thanks enough for sticking your neck out.

8. **Be Dramatic** – Use bold words and unusual statistics. Your presentation should be filled with simple, hard-hitting statements to keep your audience intrigued. Laughter never hurts either!

9. **Motivate** – End your presentation with a call to action Tell your audience exactly what they can do in response to your presentation.

10. **Take A Deep Breath, and Relax!** – Don't huddle over the lectern. If you are standing behind one, stand up tall. Move around. Use gestures for emphasis. Remember how you say something is as important as what you have to say.

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# Family Ministries Interest Survey

We don't need your name, but the following information will be helpful to our family ministries plans.

Your age group: ❑ 18-30 ❑ 31-40 ❑ 41-50 ❑ 51-60 ❑ 61-70 ❑ 71+

Gender: ❑ M ❑ F

The family ministries committee of your church is considering its plans for our church family. We would like you to help us by letting us know what would be of greatest interest to you. Please indicate the top five areas that interest you. Rank them from one to five-one being your first choice.

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| ❑ Parenting | ❑ Communication in marriage | ❑ Dating relationships |
| ❑ Grandparenting | ❑ Sibling rivalry | ❑ Relating to parents – for teens |
| ❑ Single Parenting | ❑ Marriage Enrichment | ❑ Grief and loss |
| ❑ Step-parenting | ❑ Family finance | ❑ Preparing for marriage |
| ❑ Relating to teens | ❑ Sexuality in marriage | ❑ Divorce recovery |
| ❑ Discipline | ❑ Conflict management | ❑ Children and divorce |
| ❑ Childbirth preparation | ❑ Dealing with anger | ❑ Mid-life transitions |
| ❑ Sex education | ❑ Two-career family | ❑ Self-esteem |
| ❑ Family recreation | ❑ Caring for aging parents | ❑ Stress management |
| ❑ Sabbath activities | ❑ Abuse in the family | ❑ Making peace with your past |
| ❑ Family worship | ❑ Planning for retirement | ❑ Faith development in family |

1. Are you a parent? ❑ Yes ❑ No

Number of children _____

Number living at home _____

Do you have foster children? _____

Do you have step-children? _____

Age of children: 0-5 _____

6-10 _____

11-13 _____

14-17 _____

18+ _____

2. Marital Status

| | |
|---|---|
| ❑ Never Married | ❑ Widowed |
| ❑ Married | ❑ Divorced—Remarried |
| ❑ Separated | ❑ Widowed—Remarried |
| ❑ Divorced | ❑ Engaged |

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# Appendix B
# Updated Statements

***Seventh-day Adventist Response to Same-Sex Unions:***
***A Reaffirmation of Christian Marriage***

***Seventh-day Adventist Position Statement on Homosexuality***

Note: The statements included here have been recently updated. For these and other official statements from the Seventh-day Adventist Church pertaining to marriage and family issues see our website at family.adventist.org/answers

# Seventh-day Adventist Response to Same-Sex Unions A Reaffirmation of Christian Marriage

Over the past several decades the Seventh-day Adventist Church has felt it necessary to clearly state in various ways its position in regards to marriage, the family, and human sexuality. These subjects are at the heart of many pressing issues facing society. That which for centuries has been considered to be basic Christian morality in the marriage setting is now increasingly called into question, not only in secular society but within Christian churches themselves.

The institutions of marriage and family are under attack and facing growing centrifugal forces that are tearing them apart. An increasing number of nations are not only debating the topic of "same-sex unions," but some have already passed various pieces of legislation, thus making it a world issue. The public discussion has engendered strong emotions. In light of these developments, the Seventh-day Adventist Church is clearly restating its position.

We reaffirm, without hesitation, our long-standing position as expressed in the Church's Fundamental Beliefs: "Marriage was divinely established in Eden and affirmed by Jesus to be a lifelong union between a man and a woman in loving companionship."[1] Though "sin has perverted God's ideals for marriage and family," "the family tie is the closest, the most tender and sacred of any human relationship," and thus "families need to experience renewal and reformation in their relationships" (An Affirmation of Family, 1990).[2] God instituted "marriage, a covenant-based union of two genders [male and female] physically, emotionally, and spiritually, spoken of in Scripture as 'one flesh.'" "The monogamous union in marriage of a man and a woman is . . . the only morally appropriate locus of genital or related intimate sexual expression." "Any lowering of this high view is to that extent a lowering of the heavenly ideal" (An Affirmation of Marriage, 1996).[3]

Homosexuality is a manifestation of the disturbance and brokenness in human inclinations and relations caused by the entrance of sin into the world. While everyone is subject to fallen

1 Seventh-day Adventists Believe: An exposition of the fundamental beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Doctrine 23 on 'Marriage and the Family."

2 Public Statement, An Affirmation of Family, released July 5, 1990, at the General Conference Session, Indianapolis, Indiana.

3 Statement voted by the General Conference Administrative Committee on April 23, 1996.

human nature, "we also believe that by God's grace and through the encouragement of the community of faith, an individual may live in harmony with the principles of God's Word" (Seventh-day Adventist Position Statement on Homosexuality, 2012).[4]

We hold that all people, regardless of their sexual orientation, are loved by God. We do not condone singling out any group for scorn and derision, let alone abuse. Still, God's Word that transcends time and culture does not permit a homosexual lifestyle. The Bible's opposition to same-sex unions/marriage is anchored in God's plan at creation for marriage (Gen 1:26-28; 2:20-24), in divine legislation (Lev 18:22; 20:13; 1 Cor 6:9-11), and in Jesus' explicit confirmation of a permanent, monogamous, and heterosexual marriage relationship (Matt 19:4-6).

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*This document was approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee, October 17, 2012.*

4 Statement voted by the Annual Council of the General Conference Executive Committee, October 17, 2012.

# Seventh-day Adventist Position Statement on Homosexuality

The Seventh-day Adventist Church recognizes that every human being is valuable in the sight of God, and we seek to minister to all men and women in the spirit of Jesus. We also believe that by God's grace and through the encouragement of the community of faith, an individual may live in harmony with the principles of God's Word.

Seventh-day Adventists believe that sexual intimacy belongs only within the marital relationship of a man and a woman. This was the design established by God at creation. The Scriptures declare: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (Gen 2:24, NIV). Throughout Scripture this heterosexual pattern is affirmed. The Bible makes no accommodation for homosexual activity or relationships. Sexual acts outside the circle of a heterosexual marriage are forbidden (Lev 18:5-23, 26; Lev 20:7 -21; Rom 1:24 -27; 1 Cor 6:9 -11). Jesus Christ reaffirmed the divine creation intent: "'Haven't you read,' he replied, 'that at the beginning the Creator "made them male and female," and said, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?" So they are no longer two, but one'" (Matt 19:4 -6, NIV). For these reasons Seventh-day Adventists are opposed to homosexual practices and relationships.

Jesus affirmed the dignity of all human beings and reached out compassionately to persons and families suffering the consequences of sin. He offered caring ministry and words of solace to struggling people, while differentiating His love for sinners from His clear teaching about sinful practices. As His disciples, Seventh-day Adventists endeavor to follow the Lord's instruction and example, living a life of Christ-like compassion and faithfulness.

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*This statement was voted during the Annual Council of the General Conference Executive Committee on Sunday, October 3, 1999 in Silver Spring, Maryland. Revised by the General Conference Executive Committee, October 17, 2012.*

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- How Jeff Witnessed During the Forest Fire
- Family Ties

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- Loneliness: A Spiritual Approach to a Very Human Signal
- A Message to Teens about Domestic Violence
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