

FAMILY-TO-FAMILY

Church Guide

A Winsome Plan to Help Families
Witness in Their Communities



Department of Family Ministries of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church
Adapted from the West Central Brazil Union Mission in the South American Division
A Department of Family Ministries Publication
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Available from
AdventSource
5120 Prescott Avenue
Lincoln, NE 68506
www.adventsource.org
402.486.8800
800.328.0525

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*Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture references taken from the New International Version.



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Preface

Families are a special gift from God. Despite the challenges at every step of the journey, there is nothing like a family to create a sense of belonging—a place where one is cherished despite one's share of imperfections.

God wants to use every family to be a blessing to those around them who are in need of His grace, His love and His salvation. For this notion to be a reality, families must know God for themselves and daily nurture their relationship with Him.

Ellen White declares: "Our work for Christ is to begin with the family, in the home...there is no missionary field more important than this" (*The Adventist Home*, p. 35).

It is not unusual for many Christians who are zealous for God to commit their full time and energies to reaching the lost and preaching the gospel at every opportunity. This is commendable. Nevertheless, as people of God we should be mindful of regarding our families as our first mission field.

When parents and children are devoted to Christ and are growing in grace each day, the Spirit of God can use them in a marked way to be effective witnesses for Him.

Our mission as Seventh-day Adventists is to tell the world about the saving power of Jesus Christ and His soon return to rescue us from this world of sin and pain. To be able to reach the entire world with this message and engage in a *mission to the cities* that is dynamic and sustainable, the families of the church will have to be empowered and fully engaged in carrying out this mandate.

Family-to-Family is an initiative of the Department of Family Ministries of the Seventh-day Adventist Church that seeks to involve entire families in the mission of sharing the gospel with their neighbors, relatives and friends. Although often intimidating to many who have never engaged in this kind of work, *Family-to-Family* is the kind of resource that when employed by local churches and families will help make the apparently difficult simple.

Our heartfelt thanks to Pastor Jair Gois from the West Central Brazil Union Mission in the South American Division for pioneering this initiative in his field and making available much of the material for this resource.

We pray every family in the Seventh-day Adventist Church will avail themselves of this information and allow the Spirit of God to use them to reach neighbors, relatives and friends with the saving gospel of Jesus Christ.

Maranatha!

Willie and Elaine Oliver, Directors

Department of Family Ministries

General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

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Introduction



Everyone can see that families in our world are under attack. We are inundated with stories and statistics regarding high divorce rates, domestic violence, rebellious children, pornography, and babies born to unwed parents. New research continues to emphasize an old problem: Homes are falling to pieces. Communities are populated with overwhelmed single parents, angry teens, neglected children, etc. And no culture is untouched by these results of broken families.

The entertainment industry is not helping. Television programs, movies, videos, magazines, and books make it seem normal and almost trendy to loosen our grip on the values that make solid homes. If good families were to be compared to a sapling, Satan and his host of evil angels are chopping at the roots of the family tree in order to topple down forests of marriages.

We know the family is in trouble. But have we stopped to consider the powerful witness of a positive, Christian family? It's easy to see the dark side, with the broken pieces of deteriorated families all around us. But what can church families do to help struggling homes in our communities to heal and grow? How can we introduce more of our relatives, friends, and neighbors to the Savior who loves families? Is there something we have overlooked in reaching disintegrating homes for God?

Nothing is more powerful to reach floundering families and troubled people than a Christian home. When church families reach out to community families, Satan trembles—because God created families to be the influential building blocks of society. Imperfect as our homes might be, the world looks longingly for safe places for children to grow, for examples of purity and integrity, and for family units that stand against the tide of evil in our world.

The witnessing power of one single Christian family in a neighborhood is beyond estimation. We fear the evil influences of a bad family on a good family, but with proper boundaries it would be well for us to also think about the *good* influence a Christian home can have on those around us. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, a solid home can change a community.

Notice how Ellen White describes the powerful witness of a Christian home:

“A well-ordered Christian household is a powerful argument in favor of the reality of the Christian religion—an argument that the infidel cannot gainsay. All can see that there is an influence at work in the family that affects the children, and that the God of Abraham is with them. If the homes of professed Christians had a right religious mold, they would exert a mighty influence for good. They would indeed be the ‘light of the world’” (*The Adventist Home*, p. 36).

Family-to-Family is a one-year church plan, provided by the Department of Family Ministries of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, to make the family the center of all evangelistic work. It guides all the families in the church to witness to their neighbors as a family. It fosters a harmonious work between the departments of the church and the family units of the church to reach out to families in the community.

In the *Family-to-Family* resource kit you will find three items to organize your church families to be witnesses in their community:

1. The *Church Guide*, which you are now reading, is to help pastors, elders, and Family Ministries leaders implement *Family-to-Family* in your local church. It provides the vision, training, and practical steps to help each family prepare and reach out to at least one other family in their neighborhood.
2. The *Family Guide* is used by each family in your church to prepare for being a powerful witness in the community. It contains the basic steps to spiritually prepare each family to share Christ with another family. Ideally, every family in your church should have their own booklet.
3. The *Brochure Packet* contains samples of booklets and pamphlets on family-centered topics that church families may share with their neighbors. Some of them do expand into health and spiritual topics. Your local conference, union, or division may also have additional sample brochures you may use. The annual “sharing book of the year” is another option to use. Also check with your local Adventist bookstore for any other resources that may be useful in your region.

If the devil has given high priority to the destruction of families because of their power for good in the world, then perhaps it is time the church made it a high priority to build families as witnessing teams to transform our societies—not only from person to person, but from family to family. It is an exponential plan that is blessed by the Holy Spirit.

Is your church ready to be a mighty influence for good? Let us be prepared to be a powerful light in the world.

A Word to Pastors



How would you like to powerfully share the gospel with your community while at the same time strengthening the families in your church? *Family-to-Family* (FTF) is a one-year plan to guide every family in your church to witness to at least one other family in their neighborhood. It is a simple approach based on the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy to make families the center of your church evangelistic activities.

Instead of separating all the departments in your church into independent functioning units (Sabbath School, Personal Ministries, Pathfinders, etc.), FTF ties them all together. Each department cooperates to help families reach their neighbors for Jesus.

The primary role of the pastor is to provide a vision for FTF that is specific to his or her church. Your mission is *not* to conduct all the teaching or visitation. It is best not to embrace this work alone. Ideally the pastor will support a team of church members to organize and implement FTF. The body of Christ has many different parts (1 Cor. 12:14), and your job is to equip these different gifted people, bringing them together as a team (Eph 4:12, 16).

Work closely with your church board in crafting a vision for conducting FTF in your church. Then appoint a FTF leader. This may be your head elder, Personal Ministries leader, Family Ministries leader, Women's Ministries leader or Children's Ministries leader. Next, set up a committee to help carry this ministry forward. It may consist of key leaders in different departments of the church. Meet on a monthly basis to provide guidance and listen to progress reports.

Pastors also must remember to care for their own families while shepherding the flock. It is easy to pour all of your time and energy into helping church members with their problems while unintentionally neglecting the work under your own roof. Set regular times to nurture your marriage and show interest in your children. It weakens your effectiveness as a pastor to focus only on building up the church while taking little time to care for the heart of your spouse.

Read through this FTF *Church Guide*. Pray for God to give you a vision of how your church families can reach your community. Preach on the power of families that witness for Christ (sample sermons are available in Appendix B). Organize your leaders to implement FTF. Invite your members to enlist in this spiritual program. Challenge every family to enroll, and set an example in your own family. Meet regularly with your leaders to encourage them and to hear reports. Tackle problems as they arise. And overall, be ready to rejoice as new families are brought into your church!

A Word to Church Leaders



Family-to-Family (FTF) is a powerful resource that helps every family in your church to be a collective witness for Christ to other families in their neighborhood. It is based on principles from the Bible and Spirit of Prophecy. This guide provides the simple steps to help prepare families to be witnesses for the Lord, giving practical ideas for building friendships and methods for sharing the gospel with other families.

How can church leaders help FTF be a success? First, it is essential for every church leader to spend time alone in prayer. Jesus' opening work every morning was to be alone with God. Next, it is critical for church leaders to work together with the pastor and other church leaders. God's vision for how the church is to function under Christ is like a human body. While every leader has a different function, they all have one purpose—to spread the gospel.

The power of FTF comes to your church through members who pray and work in unity. When the Holy Spirit descended on the disciples at Pentecost (Acts 2:1) after Jesus went back to heaven, they had first gathered together. They were unified. As one body they prayed for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Likewise, your church will succeed when you work in partnership with your pastor and other church leaders. God blesses churches that operate in harmony.

Ellen G. White provides these helpful thoughts:

Those who do labor together should seek to be in perfect harmony. And yet no one should feel that he cannot labor with those who do not see just as he sees, and who do not in their labors follow just his plans. If all manifest a humble, teachable spirit, there need be no difficulty. God has set in the church different gifts. These are precious in their proper places, and all may act a part in the work of preparing a people for Christ's soon coming (Gospel Workers, p. 481).

Whichever position you may hold in the church, whatever role you may play in helping the body of Christ be a light in the community, make sure the flame of the Holy Spirit burns humbly and brightly in your own heart. It is by working together with your church family that FTF will be most effective in helping win others to Jesus.

How to Implement *Family-to-Family*



Introduction

Family-to-Family (FTF) is a plan that makes the family the center of all evangelistic work in your church. It helps every family in your church witness to at least one family in the community by building friendships, meeting needs, and inviting families to learn more about Jesus through Bible studies and evangelistic meetings.

Organized plans can be a blessing or a curse—it depends on how you use them. FTF is a simple concept: church families witnessing to community families. However, there is a general tendency to make church programs more complex than they need to be, so let's try to keep things basic. Perhaps there are some families in your church who already understand how to witness for Jesus and may currently be doing this. But many families will need stepping stones to guide them.

As you follow the plans for applying FTF, use wise judgment and be flexible in adapting this program to your church. These plans are not meant to be followed in a rigid, mechanical way. Some activities may not work as well in your culture or community. Make adjustments to fit your church calendar. Provide brochures and family programs that meet the unique needs of your neighborhood. Use Bible study materials that reach different types of people in your region. And most of all, foster a love for families in your community who need to know how much Jesus loves them and that He is coming back to take all God's people to a heavenly home.

The FTF implementation plan happens in three phases over the period of roughly one year. The following is a broad overview of the program. Later sections of this *Church Guide* will break down these phases into more detailed steps, complete with resources to carry them out.

Phase 1: Prepare

The purpose of this first part is to invite the church to embrace the program and begin the work of preparing each person's heart to be a witness for Christ. This phase takes place over a two-month period. Here are four key groups that help implement FTF with a brief synopsis of their work:

Pastor: Introduces FTF to church board; preaches series on the family; invites families to enroll

Church Board: Learns about FTF; commits to program; establishes FTF committee; votes funds

Family-to-Family Committee: Meets to review the program and begin implementation

Church Families: Listen to sermon series on family; enroll in program; receive *Family Guide*; begin a prayer journal; begin reading daily family devotions found in *Family Guide*

Phase 2: Care

The second part aims to encourage every church family to make *sincere* contacts with neighbors and build friendships with at least one other family in their area. Relationships take time to build so this phase takes longer than the others. A six-month period is recommended.

Pastor: Continue to speak positively about FTF; put FTF on board agenda each month; attend FTF committee meetings; assist with training

Church Board: Hear progress reports; provide support and funding for additional program needs

Family-to-Family Committee: Coordinate training on friendship building; provide brochures for families to give to friends; coordinate church social events; set up training on giving Bible studies in homes

Church Families: Participate in a day of fasting and prayer; choose one family to contact; begin building a friendship with that family by sharing resources, inviting them to events, and eventually (when the time is right) inviting them to a Bible study

Phase 3: Share

The purpose of this final part is to *share* the gospel. Church families invite neighborhood families to attend an evangelistic meeting. This phase takes place over a four-month period. After the series everyone is encouraged to join a small group, meeting in a home, to foster continued growth in Christ.

Pastor(s): Plan and conduct an evangelistic series

Church Board: Continue to hear progress reports; support and promote evangelistic series

Family-to-Family Committee: Coordinate training on helping church families invite community families to evangelistic series; assist with special baptism celebrations; encourage small groups after evangelistic series

Church Families: Continue to build friendships with community family(ies); invite them to evangelistic series; attend series with them; hold follow-up Bible studies in homes

Simple Calendar Outline

	Pastor	Church Board	FTF Committee	Church Families
Months 1 & 2 PREPARE	Cast vision; work with board; prepare church spiritually	Commit to program; establish FTF committee and funding	Begin planning/implementation of FTF in church	Hear sermon series; enroll and receive <i>Family Guide</i> ; begin preparations
Months 3-8 CARE	Continue support; Attend FTF committee	Hear progress reports; continue support	Provide training and resources; plan church events	Choose family; fasting and prayer; make contacts
Months 9-12 SHARE	Prepare and carry out evangelistic series	Hear progress reports; continue support	Continue training and support; assist with evangelistic series	Invite to evangelistic series; attend series; provide follow-up

Phase 1: Prepare



Month 1

Pastor

1. Prayerfully read through all FTF materials.
2. Prepare a presentation for the church board (copy and share Appendix A, "Overview of *Family-to-Family*") to gain their vote and commitment.
3. Preach a sermon series on the family (see Appendix B for sample sermons or copy and paste text from the *Resource CD* and modify to your preferences).
4. Invite every family in the church to enroll in the FTF program (use sign-up sheet in Appendix C).

Church Board

1. Listen to a presentation on *Family-to-Family*, reviewing the materials and asking questions.
2. Vote to implement FTF and provide funds for the following materials and events. *Note: The board does not need to allocate all funds to the FTF committee all at once. Below are examples of financial needs to keep in mind. Suggested amounts are in parenthesis.*
 - a. Every family in the church will need a **Family Guide**. (Purchase, photocopy, or print from the *Resource CD*. One per family.)
 - b. **Brochures** for sharing will need to be purchased for families to distribute to their neighbors. (Estimate 4-8 brochures per family to distribute)
 - c. What types of **family programs/events** (health programs, children's programs, seminars on family issues) will your church hold this coming year? (Consider a goal of 3-5 church events)
 - d. What funds will be needed for **Bible study materials**? (Estimate 2-3 sets of lessons per family)
 - e. How much will need to be set aside for an **evangelistic series** at the end of the program?



Phase 1: Prepare

3. Establish a *Family-to-Family* committee to implement the program.
 - a. Recommended size: 4-7 members
 - b. Recommended meeting frequency: once or twice a month, as needed
 - c. Example of committee makeup: pastor, an elder, Family Ministries leader, Women's Ministries leader, Children's Ministries leader, Vacation Bible School leader, Personal Ministries leader (or representatives from these ministries)
4. Vote a chairperson and secretary for FTF committee

Family-to-Family Committee

1. If the church board hasn't already, choose a chairperson and secretary at the first meeting.
2. Review the *Family-to-Family Church Guide* to become better acquainted with the materials.
3. Have one person manage the list of names of church families who enrolled in the FTF program using the sign-up sheets. (Appendix C, or use index cards or set up a database.)
4. Determine how many *Family Guides* are needed and make sure they are ordered (or printed from the *Resource CD* or photocopied from Appendix D) and distributed. Every church family enrolled needs one *Family Guide*.
5. KEY POINT: The FTF committee is not meant to carry out all the work of the *Family-to-Family* program. This committee is encouraged to work with all departments of the church to involve them in supporting the program. For instance, Vacation Bible School is a wonderful way to connect families and children to your church, but the FTF committee does not run Vacation Bible School. The same is true for health programs, family ministries programs, and training people in friendship evangelism. We encourage you to cooperate with and involve many different departments to work in harmony with FTF. Members of the FTF committee are part of other ministries that will be involved in helping carry the program forward. Work as a team and share the responsibilities. *The FTF committee's primary purpose is coordination.*

Church Families

1. Look at an overview of the *Family-to-Family* program. Use Appendix A as a handout.
2. Enroll in the program.
3. Study a *Family Guide* booklet (one per family).



Month 2

Pastor

1. Put FTF on each month's church board agenda and have the FTF chairperson give a regular report.
2. Complete sermon series on the family (if not already done). Also consider preaching a sermon on the power of intercessory prayer in preparation for a day of fasting and prayer at your church.
3. Continue to invite every family in the church to enroll in the FTF program (use sign-up sheet in Appendix C, index cards or database program).
4. Encourage families to have morning and evening worship. The *Family Guide* provides 31 devotionals, one for each day of the month. This can begin at the end of the first month or sometime during the second month of the program.
5. Hold a day of fasting and prayer for families in your community sometime during this month. Suggestions for this day are found in Appendix E.

Church Board

1. Listen to FTF progress reports.
2. Provide additional support and funding as needed.
3. Vote additional FTF committee members if needed.
4. Vote on recommended programs by the FTF committee for the upcoming year:
 - a. Training events for church members
 - b. Family Ministries programs for community
 - c. Evangelistic series



Phase 1: Prepare

Family-to-Family Committee

1. Plan with the pastor a day of fasting and prayer for families in your community.
2. Begin plans for a training event for church members on how to build friendships with their neighbors:
 - a. When will the training event take place?
 - b. Who will conduct the training?
 - c. Have materials ready for this training (see Appendix F).
3. Manage the names of families enrolled in the FTF program using the sign-up sheets (Appendix C, index cards or database).
4. Determine if any more *Family Guides* are needed and make sure they are ordered (or printed from the *Resource CD* or photocopied from Appendix D) and distributed. Each family enrolled needs one *Family Guide*.
5. Encourage church members to begin using their *Family Guide* devotionals each day.
6. Invite church members to write down the names of families in their neighborhood in the prayer journal section of their *Family Guide*. Urge them to pray for God to help them know which family (or families) to contact.

Church Families

1. Begin using the daily devotionals in the *Family Guide*.
2. Write down the names of families in your neighborhood in the prayer journal section of your *Family Guide* and begin praying for them each day. *Please note:* The families in your prayer journal do not need to be in your immediate neighborhood. They might be families in your larger community—families you know from your work, from your children's activities, or through other acquaintances. However, the families you will reach do need to be close enough for you to have regular contact with them.
3. Pray especially for God to help you choose one family to contact.
4. Participate in the day of fasting and prayer, asking God to help your family be a witness for Jesus to your neighbors.



Phase 2: Care



Month 3

Pastor

1. Keep FTF on the church board agenda and have the FTF chairperson give a regular report.
2. Assist and support a training program on making contacts and building friendships with families in your community.
3. Set an example to the congregation by having your own family participate in FTF. Choose a family in your neighborhood to reach.
4. Continue to encourage families to have morning and evening worship. Provide suggestions for materials to use after they finish the 31 devotionals in their *Family Guide*.

Church Board

1. Listen to FTF progress reports.
2. Provide additional support and funding as needed.
3. Vote additional FTF committee members if needed.
4. Vote on recommended programs by the FTF committee for the upcoming year:
 - a. Training events for church members
 - b. Family Ministries programs for community
 - c. Evangelistic series

Family-to-Family Committee

1. Conduct a training event for church members on how to build friendships with their neighbors.
 - a. When will the training event take place?
 - b. Who will conduct the training?
 - c. Have materials ready for this training (see Appendix F).



Phase 2: Care

2. Manage the names of families enrolled in the FTF program using the sign-up sheets (Appendix C, index cards or database).
3. Ask church members to report which family they will focus on reaching. Keep records of these community family names.
4. Determine if any more *Family Guides* are needed and make sure they are ordered (or printed from the *Resource CD* or photocopied from Appendix D) and distributed. Each family enrolled needs one *Family Guide*.
5. Pray over all the names of church and community families in your records.

Church Families

1. Continue having morning and evening devotions with your family. Keep praying for all the families in your prayer journal.
2. Choose one community family that you will focus on reaching. Share that name with the FTF committee.
3. Attend the training seminar on how to build friendships with families in your community.
4. Make your first contact with the family you will focus on reaching. Bring a simple gift, such as cookies or a loaf of bread, and spend a little time getting acquainted.

Month 4

Pastor

1. Keep FTF on the church board agenda and have the FTF chairperson give a regular report.
2. Encourage church members to begin making contacts with community families.
3. Set an example to the congregation by having your own family participate in FTF. Choose a family in your neighborhood to reach.
4. Continue to encourage families to have morning and evening worship. Provide suggestions for materials to use after they finish the 31 devotionals in their *Family Guide*.

Church Board

1. Listen to FTF progress reports.
2. Provide additional support and funding as needed.
3. Vote additional FTF committee members if needed.



4. Vote on recommended programs by the FTF committee for the upcoming year:

- a. Training events for church members
- b. Family Ministries programs for community
- c. Evangelistic series

Family-to-Family Committee

1. Meet as a committee. Order brochures to give to church families to distribute to community families.
2. For months 4-9, hold a monthly or bi-monthly meeting for all church members enrolled in FTF.
 - a. Meetings can be held after a potluck on Sabbath afternoon at the church.
 - b. The focus of the meeting is to encourage all families to continue praying and reaching out to community families.
 - c. Distribute brochures that can be handed out in their neighborhood. Start with brochures that discuss general (but pertinent) health and family issues. Hold off on directly religious materials until later.
 - d. Provide a short review of the previous month's training event on making friends.
 - e. Share upcoming monthly church events that people can invite their friends to attend.
 - f. Suspend these meetings during an evangelistic series.
3. Continue to manage the names of church families enrolled in the FTF program using the sign-up sheets (Appendix C, index cards or database).
4. Ask church members who have not yet done so to report which family they will focus on reaching. Make records of these community family names.
5. Pray over all the names of church and community families in your records.

Church Families

1. Continue having morning and evening devotions with your family and keep praying for all the families in your prayer journal.
2. Visit your one community family and continue to build a friendship. Give them a brochure that might interest them.
3. Attend the monthly FTF meeting for continued support and encouragement.

Phase 2: Care

Month 5

Pastor

1. Keep FTF on the church board agenda and have the FTF chairperson give a regular report.
2. Encourage church members to continue making contacts with community families.
3. Preach on a family ministries topic, such as parenting, dealing with anger, improving your marriage, etc.
4. Continue to encourage families to have morning and evening worship. Provide suggestions for additional materials to use.

Church Board

1. Listen to FTF progress reports.
2. Provide additional support and funding as needed.
3. Vote on new upcoming programs by the FTF committee for the year:
 - a. Training events for church members
 - b. Family Ministries programs for community
 - c. Evangelistic series

Family-to-Family Committee

1. Meet as a committee:
 - a. Determine amount of additional brochures to order and give to church families to distribute to community families.
 - b. Plan a church event that members can invite people to attend. This might be a health-oriented class on cooking or a Family Ministries class on a topic such as dealing with bullying at school.
 - c. Plan the next monthly meeting for all church members to attend for encouragement and direction.
2. Hold a monthly meeting for all church members enrolled in FTF.
 - a. Share upcoming monthly church events that people can invite their friends to attend.
 - b. Provide time for people to share their experiences and ask questions.
 - c. Distribute brochures on health and family issues that can be handed out in their neighborhood.
3. Continue to manage the names of church families enrolled in the FTF program using the sign-up sheets (Appendix C, index cards, or a database).

Phase 2: Care

4. Note: Sometimes the first names that church families focus on reaching don't work out so well. Encourage flexibility. Invite members to continue praying for those families, but try reaching out to another family on their list.
5. As a committee, pray over all the names of church and community families in your records.

Church Families

1. Continue morning and evening devotions with your family and keep praying for all the families in your prayer journal.
2. Visit your one community family and continue to build a friendship. Give them a brochure that might interest them, mostly likely on the topic of health or a Family Ministries theme. At this time you can try inviting them to an upcoming church event.
3. If a neighborhood family does not want to be contacted, show understanding and focus on another family. Do not get discouraged. Do not become pushy. Keep praying for that family, then ask God to lead your family to another family.
4. Attend the monthly FTF meeting for continued support and encouragement.

Month 6

Pastor

1. Keep FTF on the church board agenda and have the FTF chairperson give a regular report.
2. Encourage church members to continue making contacts with community families.
3. Attend church events and meet new families that are visiting from the community.
4. Continue to encourage families to have morning and evening worship. Provide suggestions for additional materials to use.

Church Board

1. Listen to FTF progress reports.
2. Provide additional support and funding as needed.
3. Vote on new upcoming programs by the FTF committee for the year:
 - a. Training events for church members
 - b. Family Ministries programs for community
 - c. Evangelistic series



Phase 2: Care

Family-to-Family Committee

1. Meet as a committee:
 - a. Determine amount of additional brochures to order and give to church families to distribute to community families.
 - b. Plan another church event that members can invite people to attend. This might be a health-oriented class on cooking or a Family Ministries class that teaches fun family games and activities.
 - c. Plan the next monthly meeting for all church members to attend for encouragement and direction.
2. Hold a monthly meeting for all church members enrolled in FTF.
 - a. Share upcoming monthly church events that people can invite their friends to attend.
 - b. Provide time for people to share their experiences and ask questions.
 - c. Distribute brochures on health and family issues that can be handed out in their neighborhood.
3. Continue to manage the names of church families enrolled in the FTF program using the sign-up sheets (Appendix C, index cards, or a database).
4. As a committee, pray over all the names of church and community families in your records.

Church Families

1. Continue morning and evening devotions with your family and keep praying for all the families in your prayer journal.
2. Visit your one community family and continue to build a friendship. Give them a brochure that might interest them, mostly likely on the topic of health or a Family Ministries theme. Try inviting them to an upcoming church event.
3. Look for ways that you might be a blessing to your chosen family. Perhaps they have a special need in their home (extra help with babysitting, assistance with yard work, a ride to the doctor's office, etc.).
4. Attend the monthly FTF meeting for continued support and encouragement.



Month 7

Pastor

1. Keep FTF on the church board agenda and have FTF chairperson give a regular report.
2. Encourage church members to continue making contacts with community families. Remember, this month is a turning point and church families are encouraged to begin looking for ways to share their faith with their chosen families.
3. Attend church events and meet new families that are visiting from the community.
4. Continue to encourage families to have morning and evening worship. Provide suggestions for additional materials to use.

Church Board

1. Listen to FTF progress reports.
2. Provide additional support and funding as needed.
3. Vote on new upcoming programs by the FTF committee for the year:
 - a. Training events for church members
 - b. Family Ministries programs for community
 - c. Evangelistic series

Family-to-Family Committee

1. Meet as a committee:
 - a. Determine amount of additional brochures to order and give to church families to distribute to community families.
 - b. Plan another church event that members can invite people to attend. This might be another health-oriented class on cooking or a Family Ministries class on a topic such as homeschooling or finding hobbies for children.
 - c. Plan the next monthly meeting for all church members to attend for encouragement and direction.
2. Hold a monthly meeting for all church members enrolled in FTF.
 - a. Explain that this month is a turning point. Encourage families to prayerfully look for opportunities to begin sharing their faith with other families. This might happen through:
 - i. A spiritual conversation
 - ii. Asking the family if there is something on their hearts that you could include in your prayers

Phase 2: Care

- iii. Sharing Christian literature on topics such as faith, salvation, the Bible, etc.
 - iv. Inviting people to take Bible studies (allowing the Holy Spirit to lead concerning when would be best to begin)
 - b. Share upcoming monthly church events that people can invite their friends to attend.
 - c. Provide time for people to share their experiences and ask questions.
 - d. Distribute brochures on health and family issues that can be handed out in their neighborhood.
3. Continue to manage the names of church families enrolled in the FTF program using the sign-up sheets (Appendix C, index cards, or a database). Also keep track of the names of the particular families that each church family is seeking to reach.
4. As a committee, pray over all the names of church and community families in your records.

Church Families

1. Continue morning and evening devotions with your family and keep praying for all the families in your prayer journal.
2. Ask God to lead you in making contacts this month. Here are three ways to reach out:
 - a. Visit your one community family and continue to build a friendship. Give them a brochure on a topic that might interest them, such as a health or a Family Ministries theme. Try inviting them to an upcoming church event.
 - b. Look for more ways that you can be a blessing to your chosen family, such as extra help with babysitting, assistance with yard work, swapping recipes, etc.).
 - c. This month is a turning point. Begin looking for ways to share your faith. This can happen through:
 - i. A spiritual conversation
 - ii. Asking the family if there is something on their hearts you could include in your prayers
 - iii. Sharing Christian literature on topics such as faith, salvation, the Bible, etc.
 - iv. Inviting people to take Bible studies (allowing the Holy Spirit to lead concerning when would be best to begin)
3. Attend the monthly FTF meeting for continued support and encouragement.

Month 8

Pastor

1. Keep FTF on the church board agenda and have the FTF chairperson give a regular report.
2. Encourage church members to continue making contacts with community families. Remember, last month was a turning point and church families are encouraged to continue looking for ways to share their faith.
3. Preach about the story of people like Philip witnessing (Acts 8:26-37) or Andrew bringing Peter to Jesus (John 1:40-42).
4. Attend church events and meet new families that are visiting from the community.
5. Begin brainstorming about the upcoming evangelistic series.

Church Board

1. Listen to FTF progress reports.
2. Provide additional support and funding as needed.
3. Vote on new upcoming programs by the FTF committee for the year:
 - a. Training events for church members
 - b. Family Ministries programs for community
 - c. Evangelistic series

Family-to-Family Committee

1. Meet as a committee:
 - a. Determine amount of additional brochures to order and give to church families to distribute to community families.
 - b. Plan another church event that members can invite people to attend. This might be something for children like a Vacation Bible School or children's story time program.
 - c. Plan the next monthly meeting for all church members to attend for encouragement and direction.
2. Hold a monthly meeting for all church members enrolled in FTF.
 - a. Explain that last month was a turning point.



Phase 2: Care

Encourage families to continue prayerfully looking for opportunities to share their faith with other families. This might happen through:

- i. A spiritual conversation
 - ii. Asking if they have any prayer requests
 - iii. Sharing Christian literature on topics such as faith, salvation, the Bible, etc.
 - iv. Inviting people to take Bible studies
(allowing the Holy Spirit to lead concerning when would be best to begin)
 - b. Share upcoming monthly church events that people can invite their friends to attend.
 - c. Provide time for people to share their experiences and ask questions.
 - d. Distribute brochures on health and family issues that can be handed out in their neighborhood.
 - e. Pray together as a group for all the families in the community, especially those being reached by church families.
3. Continue to manage the names of church families enrolled in the FTF program using the sign-up sheets (Appendix C, index cards, or a database). Also keep track of the names of the particular families that each church family is seeking to reach.
 4. As a committee, pray over all the names of church and community families in your records.

Church Families

1. Continue morning and evening devotions with your family and keep praying for all the families in your prayer journal.
2. Visit your one community family and continue to build a friendship. Give them a brochure on a topic that might interest them, such as health or a Family Ministries theme. Try inviting them to an upcoming church event.
3. Look for more ways you can be a blessing to your outreach family, such as extra help with babysitting, assistance with yard work, carpooling, etc.
4. Prayerfully listen for ways to share your faith through a testimony, piece of literature, or an invitation to a Bible study in your home or theirs.
5. Attend the monthly FTF meeting for continued support and encouragement.



Phase 3: Share



Month 9

Pastor

1. Keep FTF on the church board agenda and have the FTF chairperson give a regular report.
2. Encourage church members to continue making contacts with community families. Remember, last month was a turning point and church families are encouraged to continue looking for ways to share their faith.
3. Preach about the power of sharing the Bible with other people.
4. Attend church events and meet new families that are visiting from the community.
5. Begin preparing for the upcoming evangelistic series to begin in month 10.

Church Board

1. Listen to FTF progress reports.
2. Provide additional support and funding as needed.
3. Give special attention to preparing for the upcoming evangelistic series.

Family-to-Family Committee

1. Meet as a committee:
 - a. Determine amount of additional brochures to order and give to church families to distribute to community families.
 - b. Plan another church event that members can invite people to attend. This might be something on a family ministries topic like helping your children succeed in school.
 - c. Plan the next monthly meeting for all church members to attend for encouragement and direction.



Phase 3: Share

2. Hold a monthly meeting for all church members enrolled in FTF.
 - a. By now families should be encouraged to start simple Bible readings or Bible studies in their homes or in neighbors' homes. Invite members who have begun studies to share reports in order to encourage other families.
 - b. Review methods of encouraging the initiation of Bible studies.
 - i. Go over different ways to begin a spiritual conversation with someone.
 - ii. Ask if you can pray with them or if they have a prayer request.
 - iii. Hand out samples of Christian literature that can be shared with neighbors.
 - iv. Teach people how to invite neighbors to start Bible studies (allowing the Holy Spirit to lead concerning when it would be best to begin).
 - c. Share upcoming monthly church events that people can invite their friends to attend.
 - d. Provide time for people to share their experiences and ask questions.
 - e. Pray together as a group for all the families in the community, especially those being reached by church families.
3. Continue to manage the names of church families enrolled in the FTF program using the sign-up sheets (Appendix C, index cards, or a database). Also keep track of the names of the particular families that each church family is seeking to reach.
4. As a committee, pray over all the names of church and community families in your records.

Church Families

1. Continue morning and evening devotions with your family and keep praying for all the families in your prayer journal.
2. Visit your one community family and continue to build a friendship. Give them a brochure on a topic that might interest them regarding religion or the Bible. Try inviting them to an upcoming church event.
3. Look for more ways you can be a blessing to your chosen family, such as extra help with babysitting, assistance with yard work, or just lending an ear).
4. Offer to begin Bible readings or Bible studies in your neighbor's home or in your own home.
5. Attend the monthly FTF meeting for continued support and encouragement.



Month 10

Pastor

1. Keep FTF on the church board agenda and have the FTF chairperson give a regular report.
2. Preach on the great commission in Matthew 28. Encourage all members to support the upcoming evangelistic series.
3. Attend church events and meet new families that are visiting from the community.
4. Conduct another day of fasting in prayer in preparation for the evangelistic series.
5. Begin the evangelistic series.

Church Board

1. Listen to FTF progress reports.
2. Provide additional support and funding as needed.
3. Give special attention to the preparation of the upcoming evangelistic series.

Family-to-Family Committee

1. Meet as a committee:
 - a. Almost all your attention will now focus on supporting the evangelistic series.
 - b. Make sure evangelistic brochures are given to all families that are being reached.
2. Hold a monthly meeting for all church members enrolled in FTF.
 - a. Explain that home Bible studies will stop during the evangelistic series and that everyone should support and attend these meetings.
 - b. Encourage families who have not conducted home Bible studies to still invite their neighbors to come to the meetings.
 - c. Provide time for people to share their experiences and ask questions.
 - d. Pray together as a group for all the families in the community, especially those being reached by church families.
3. As an additional way of contacting people, use the names collected from your index cards or database for sending out invitations to the series.
4. As a committee, pray over all the names of church and community families in your records.

Church Families

1. Continue morning and evening devotions with your family and keep praying for all the families in your prayer journal.

Phase 3: Share

2. Personally invite your chosen community family to the upcoming evangelistic series.
3. If you are holding Bible studies in your home (or in their home) you will stop the studies temporarily in order to attend the evangelistic meetings. After the series is over you can resume your studies.
4. Attend the monthly FTF meeting for continued support and encouragement.
5. Participate in another day of fasting in prayer in preparation for the upcoming evangelistic series.

Month 11

Pastor

1. Skip board meeting this month.
2. Focus all your attention and energies into the evangelistic series.
3. Do visitation among interests.
4. If you are preaching the evangelistic series, your time will be taken up preparing for this.

Church Board

1. Skip board meeting this month.
2. All attention and energy should be focused on supporting the meetings.

Family-to-Family Committee

1. Have a short committee meeting this month. Begin laying plans for a follow-up program after the evangelistic series, as new families will have joined the church. There will be three parts to follow-up:
 - i. Special banquet and testimony time after baptisms. Everyone in the church and family members of the baptized are encouraged to attend.
 - ii. Encourage home Bible studies to resume (after the series is over) in order to establish the newly baptized members in their faith.
 - iii. Help the new members to begin learning how to share their faith and give Bible studies themselves for their family and friends who do not yet know Jesus.
2. Skip the monthly FTF meeting for all church members since all energy should be focused on the evangelistic series.
3. As a committee, pray over all the names of church and community families in your records.

Church Families

1. Continue morning devotions with your family (evening devotions can be attending the evangelistic series) and keep praying for all the families in your prayer journal.

Phase 3: Share

2. Attend the evangelistic series with your neighbors. And even if they do not come, attend and support the evangelistic series yourself.
3. If you are holding Bible studies in your home (or in their home), temporarily stop the studies and attend the evangelistic meetings with them. After the series is over you can resume your studies.
4. There is no FTF meeting during the evangelistic series.

Month 12

Pastor

1. Keep FTF on the board agenda. Have a final report given. Discuss what went well during the year and what should change.
2. Make visits to newly baptized members.
3. Attend the banquet and testimony meeting for newly baptized members (everyone in the church is invited).
4. Encourage church families to stay in touch with and encourage their neighbors, whether or not they were baptized.

Church Board

1. Listen to the FTF progress report.
 - a. Discuss what went well.
 - b. Discuss what needs changing.
 - c. If the board is ready, vote on whether to continue the program next year.

Family-to-Family Committee

1. Meet to plan the banquet and testimony meeting.
 - a. Work closely with the deacons and deaconesses, as well as the social committee, to plan this event.
2. Plan an FTF support meeting for all church members.
 - a. Discuss what went well.
 - b. Discuss what might need changing.
 - c. Encourage all families to continue to support and stay connected with their neighbors whether or not they were baptized.



Phase 3: Share

- d. Encourage everyone to attend the baptisms, banquet, and testimony time.
- e. Encourage follow-up Bible studies to resume (or begin) in homes. Explain the importance of:
 - i. Encouraging newly baptized members in their new faith
 - ii. Helping them to share their testimony with others
 - iii. Learn how to give Bible studies to their friends and neighbors
- 3. As a committee, pray over all the names of church and community families in your records.

Church Families

- 1. Continue morning and evening devotions with your family and keep praying for all the families in your prayer journal.
- 2. Attend the baptisms, banquet and testimony service whether or not your neighbors were baptized. Show support to all new members.
- 3. Resume Bible studies in your home or your neighbor's home to help establish newly baptized members in their faith. Encourage people who have not yet made a commitment to keep growing and learning.
- 4. Begin praying to the Lord to reveal whom your family should focus on next to make friends for Jesus.



Appendix A

Handout: Overview of *Family-to-Family* Program

Everyone can see that families in our world are under attack. Homes are falling to pieces as our society is crowding out the values that make solid homes. We know the family is in trouble. But have we stopped to consider the powerful witness of a positive, Christian family?

Nothing is more influential to reach floundering families and troubled people than a Christian home. When church families reach out to community families, Satan trembles—because God created families to be the influential building blocks of society.

Notice how Ellen White describes the prevailing witness of a Christian home:

“A well-ordered Christian household is a powerful argument in favor of the reality of the Christian religion—an argument that the infidel cannot gainsay. All can see that there is an influence at work in the family that affects the children, and that the God of Abraham is with them. If the homes of professed Christians had a right religious mold, they would exert a mighty influence for good. They would indeed be the ‘light of the world’” (The Adventist Home, p. 36).

Family-to-Family is a one-year church plan, provided by the Department of Family Ministries of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, to guide all the families in the church to witness to their neighbors as a family.

There are three phases of *Family-to-Family*.

1. **Prepare.** The first two months are spent preparing our hearts to be witnesses for Christ. Through sermons on the family, daily devotions, and intercessory prayer, families make themselves available for the use of the Holy Spirit.
2. **Care.** The next six months focus on building friendships with our neighbors through caring, sincere contacts. Bringing simple gifts, sharing resources, inviting them to social events, looking for ways to meet their needs and praying with neighborhood families helps them be more receptive to spiritual growth.
3. **Share.** The last four months lead people, as the Holy Spirit opens the way, toward spiritual topics. Testimonies are shared, invitations to home Bible studies are given, and families are eventually invited to an evangelistic series.

The church and our society are made up of family units. The influence of one Christian family on another is inestimable. It is God’s plan that families reach out to other families in our communities. And as we witness for Jesus, our own families will be strengthened.

If you would like to see families at the center of your church’s evangelistic work, if you desire the church to harmoniously reach out to your community, and if you want your own family to be strengthened, then enroll in *Family-to-Family*. Begin praying for God to use your family in a mighty way for His glory!

Appendix B

Four Sermons on the Family

Sermon 1 – A Prescription for Family Happiness

“Do to others as you would have them do to you” (Luke 6:31).

INTRODUCTION

A pastor decided to observe the people who came to quietly pray at his church. One day the door opened and an old man wearing a ragged shirt came through the foyer and into the sanctuary. He approached the platform, knelt down, and bowed his head. After a few moments the bedraggled looking man got up and left. In the following days, always at noon, the same scene was repeated. And each time the visitor knelt at the front of the church he also set down a lunchbox.

The pastor’s curiosity rose. He approached and asked the stranger what he was doing. The elderly man said his name was John and that he was a factory worker in a nearby neighborhood. He explained that each day after eating his lunch he reserved time to pray. He chose to spend a few quiet moments with God in this church since it was close to his workplace.

The worker then whispered to the pastor the simple words to his daily prayer: “Here I am, Lord. Once more I want to tell You how happy I am since we’ve become friends. Thank you for forgiving all my sins. Though I don’t really know how to pray, I just want to express my desire to love and to live for You today.”

The pastor was stunned at the genuine faith of the man wearing dirty work clothes kneeling beside him. He told the factory worker that he was always welcome to come and pray at his church. The kneeling visitor replied, “Thank you. Now it’s time for me to go.” He quickly stood and left the church.

Then the pastor quietly knelt in the same place with a reverence he never had before. Something amazing happened to the clergyman—He had a powerful encounter with Jesus. Tears ran down his face as he repeated the old man’s prayer: “Here I am, Lord. Once more I want to tell You how happy I am since we’ve become friends. Thank you for forgiving all my sins. Though I don’t really know how to pray, I just want to express my desire to love and live for You today.”

One day the pastor noticed that John hadn’t shown up at noon to pray. He became worried when several more days went by and the old man still hadn’t come to the church. So the pastor went to the nearby factory and learned that John was ill and had been admitted to the hospital. The pastor went immediately to visit his friend.

The pastor quickly learned that John’s presence at the hospital was having an impact on patients and staff. The old man’s joy was contagious to everyone who came around him. As the pastor sat by the bedside of the smiling factory worker the head nurse came into the room. She whispered to the pastor, “I can’t understand how John can be so joyful when nobody comes to visit him. He never receives cards, flowers, or phone calls either! He doesn’t seem to have anyone he can really lean on for support.”

When the nurse left the room the old man leaned forward in his bed and smiled at the pastor. “The nurse is wrong. She doesn’t know that a Visitor comes to see me every day at noon! My dear Friend sits by my side, holds my hands and looks at me and says, “I want to tell you how happy I am since we’ve become friends. I love to hear your prayers and think about you every day. I am here today to tell you, keep loving and living for Me.”

I. THE VERBS OF GOOD FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

This little story holds the key to family happiness: loving and living. This formula is also found in our opening Bible text. Jesus said, "Do to others as you would have them do to you" (Luke 6:31). There is a common point between the prayer of the factory worker and the words of Christ. Both speak about living and loving. Both contain verbs that teach us about being a happy family.

In order for a man to be a good husband, he must know how to love and how to live. The same is true for wives and children. We all need to love others and live for others. For the Christian, these two verbs cannot be separated.

Loving and living unite theory and practice. Loving and living give support to our words and reason for our actions. When we separate loving and living, our relationships will fall apart. When we isolate our words from our actions, our feelings from our behaviors, and our talk from our walk, it creates hypocrisy.

Loving without living (or living without loving) results in a host of family problems. It leaves others in our lives feeling empty and lonely. It leads us to demand from others and when we don't get what we want, we become critical. Loving without living it is theory without practice. It is a mere performance—a display of nothingness.

II. THE FORMULA OF GOOD FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

The formula for good family relationships always contains both loving and living. We erode our family's happiness when we separate these two verbs. Notice how this happens when people try to understand Ephesians 5:23, 24 where it tells us "the husband is the head of the wife" and also says "wives should submit to their husbands."

When we isolate these statements from their context it is the same as separating "loving" from "living." Husbands can read *part* of Paul's words and believe they can act like a dictator and treat their wife like a slave. That is why it is important to read the entire teaching on this topic. Verse 25 adds, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her."

The Apostle Paul teaches that a husband has the responsibility to serve and care for his wife. He shows that a wife serves through submission, but a husband serves his wife through sacrifice. He must be willing to die for her.

Luke 22:26 endorses this idea when it says: "...the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves." Jesus tells us that the greatest duty of a leader is to serve others. We shouldn't strive to be great husbands or wives, great parents, or great children. We should try to be great *Christians*. This will take care of everything else. True greatness, in the eyes of God, is to humbly love and live for others—all others—in our families.



Our actions in our family will bring happiness to our homes when we combine the two verbs of loving and living. They teach us that our goal in the family is not to focus on getting *our* needs met. God did not create the family for us to gain satisfaction for ourselves at the expense of others. The family is a community of people that cooperates to fulfill everyone's needs. Happiness in the family comes when we adopt a servant's attitude and put others before ourselves. As Jesus said, "Treat others the way you would like to be treated."

Family conflicts arise when individual members live in an immature, selfish way and are unwilling to serve others. Hurt occurs in the hearts of family members when we do not take the time to deeply understand the needs of others.

There are many lessons on loving and living that will bring happiness to our homes. Here are just a few more to keep in mind.

1. *Serve your family unselfishly.* (Don't expect rewards for doing kind deeds.)
2. *Be willing to give up your rights.* (When we demand our rights, we ignore the needs of others. It destroys the attitude of service in our hearts.)
3. *Align your attitude with the teachings of Jesus.* (We are inclined not to notice the needs of others when we are concerned with our own pleasures.)
4. *Serve your family according to their needs.* (Learn to identify the specific needs of all family members and look for creative ways to satisfy them.)
5. *Be a genuine servant.* (Put yourself into the shoes of other family members. Empathize with them.)

III. THE RESULTS OF GOOD FAMILY RELATIONSHIPS

At this point you might think that a happy family requires everyone to be like saints. That's partly true and partly false. The Bible clearly states, "I am the LORD your God; consecrate yourselves and be holy, because I am holy..." (Leviticus 11:44). If you think it is only your family members who want you to be a godly person, keep in mind that the Lord first calls you to live for Him.

A saint, in the best sense of the word, is someone who gives him or herself completely to God. It doesn't mean that person never makes mistakes or is infallible, but it does describe someone striving for a higher level of spirituality and a deeper walk with God.

A saint will reveal an attitude of loving and living. This will be most clearly demonstrated in the family circle.

Notice these thoughts from the Spirit of Prophecy that widen our perspective on this topic:

- "He who would become a saint in heaven must first become a saint in his own family" (*The Adventist Home*, p. 317).
- "Just as you conduct yourself in your home life, you are registered in the books of heaven" (*The Adventist Home*, p. 317).



- “Parents, let not your religion be simply a profession, but let it become a reality”
(*The Adventist Home*, p. 317).
- “Where religion is a practical thing in the home, great good is accomplished”
(*The Adventist Home*, p. 318).

As we can see, where there is a lack of home religion, a profession of faith has no value. But when all members of the family engage in developing their faith, family relationships will not only bless the home itself but will also be a light to our communities and neighbors.

CONCLUSION

God’s prescription for family happiness has two ingredients that work together—loving and living. If they are separated, they are worthless. To live without loving or to love without living it is meaningless. Our religious profession becomes cold and mechanical without love. So also our words of love are mere sentimentalism without living proof.

To summarize, the prescription for family happiness is found in putting these two verbs together: loving God and living this love in our families. When family members genuinely seek to love the Lord and live godly lives, our homes will be like brilliant lights in a dark world.

Like the man at the beginning of this sermon, do you desire to love the Lord and live for Him each day in your family?

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Sermon 2 – Sons of Promise

“Then God said, ‘Yes, but your wife Sarah will bear you a son, and you will call him Isaac. I will establish my covenant with him as an everlasting covenant for his descendants after him’”
(Gen. 17:19).

INTRODUCTION

In a parent’s meeting at an elementary school the principal emphasized the importance of fathers and mothers supporting their children. She encouraged them to take time every day to connect with their children and try to attend as many school functions as possible. Most of the parents in that community both worked outside the home, so she knew it would be challenging for them to dedicate the amount of time they should to understanding their kids.

When she was finished, one father humbly stood up and explained that during the week he wasn’t able to see his son because of his work schedule. He left early in the morning while his son was still sleeping and returned late in the evening after his son went to bed. The principal was sad to hear the father’s dilemma and knew that it must hurt the heart of his son.

But then the father told about a little ritual he went through every evening after coming home from work. This caring dad would slip quietly into his son’s room to kiss him goodnight, being careful not to awaken the boy. Then, in order to let his son know that he kissed him good night, he would tie a knot in the corner of the bed sheet. When his son awakened each morning, he knew his father had kissed him good night. The small loop in the sheet was the father’s way of communicating love to his son. The father’s story moved the heart of the principal, especially when it occurred to her that this boy was one of the best students in her school.

There are many different ways to communicate love to others. This father found a simple and effective way to tell his son he was thinking about him. The child felt his father's care through an uncomplicated gesture. Sometimes we focus too much on how to say something and forget to communicate with genuine feeling. A sincere kiss and a small corner of a sheet twisted into a little knot are worth more to a son than a dutiful pat on the head or lots of expensive gifts.

Do your children feel your love for them? Does the language of your heart go beyond your words? A simple kiss full of pure affection, given without speaking one sentence, has the power to heal headaches and scratched knees. It can dispel a child's fear of darkness. Even a little baby, who cannot understand one word you may say, can sense the love of your heart being communicated through your actions.

Today's message focuses on the God-given role Christian parents have been given to communicate genuine love to their children. The opening Scripture text tells us about one of the greatest examples of parenting in biblical history: the life of Abraham.

I. THE SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION OF ABRAHAM

It all began when God, the Father of all fathers, called Abram (whose name later became Abraham) to be the father of a great nation. Even before Abraham responded to the Lord's call to leave Ur of the Chaldeans, God was preparing the spiritual foundation of this chosen man who lived in a pagan society.

Abraham would not be the father of just any child. His offspring was special. His son Isaac would be the son of promise. So as Isaac would not be an ordinary baby; Abraham could not be an ordinary father. But from the beginning both Abraham and Sarah did not fully understand their roles.

Parents today are being called to raise godly children. And like Abraham and Sarah, most fathers and mothers do not realize the importance of their work. Just as God invested in the spiritual foundations of Abraham's life, so we must also lay a strong foundation for our children.

Perhaps you feel, as a Christian parent, that building a solid base for your home is very difficult—especially in the times in which we live. God knows how you feel. The work of parenting is not easy. Even the Lord had challenges in teaching Abraham to be a godly father.

For instance, take the story of Hagar. Abraham and Sarah became very impatient with God as they grew older and waited for the son of promise, so Abraham listened to Sarah's advice to take Hagar as a wife in order to bear a child for their family. That was a common practice in Abraham's times—but it was not God's plan. Abraham was not to follow human ways of becoming the father of a great nation. He stepped away from setting a proper spiritual foundation for his home.

God rebuked Abraham and told him that Hagar's boy would not be the son of promise. The old patriarch needed to learn the two words that describe God's foundation for parenting: complete dependence. When God adopted Abraham and told him he would have a son of promise, and that from his boy a great nation would grow, it took a long time for the first part of this agreement to be fulfilled. But why?

God allowed Abraham to exhaust all the human possibilities for fulfilling the promise. The Lord let this chosen man come to the point of impossibility—and then Abraham became a father.

Through a miracle of faith in God's promises, Isaac was born. He was a son of dependence, a result of a father completely trusting in God. It took a long time for Abraham to learn his lessons on faith.

Isaac's miraculous birth taught Abraham that though he was the biological father of this boy, Isaac was a son of God. Without the Lord's intervention, Isaac's conception and birth would have never happened. He truly was a child of God.

II. THE SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION OF ISAAC

The spiritual foundation for Isaac's life began with his father. God invested in developing Abraham's faith so that Abraham could work with Isaac's spiritual life. The Lord had a plan for all parents to help in the training of their children. Isaac, as a son of promise, would also have offspring who would be children of promise as well. They in turn would have children become a great nation.

The faith of Isaac took a big step forward at a pivotal moment in his life. He truly became a son of promise, but not when he was born. It happened on a mountaintop when his father responded to God's call to sacrifice his one and only son.

On one of the mountains in the region of Moriah, father and son became the pioneers to a generation of promise. When Abraham obeyed God and took his son to sacrifice him as a burnt offering, he became the father of the son of a promise. And when Isaac obeyed his father and allowed himself to be bound and laid on the altar, he truly became a son of promise.

The story of Abraham and Isaac is the story of God the Father and Jesus Christ the Messiah. Just as Jesus' birth was a miracle, just as Jesus was bound and taken to the same place as Isaac, so was Christ the ultimate fulfillment of this ancient story, which was first spoken of in Genesis 13:15.

All of Abraham's descendants lived by this promise. They identified themselves as children of Abraham. But when the ultimate "Son of Promise" came, Jesus the Messiah, the way was opened for all to become heirs of the promise. A new genealogy was established that continues through today. All may become children of the promise if they accept God as their heavenly Father.

Our role as parents is to guide our children into becoming sons and daughters of God. Our primary duty is to raise children of promise who accept Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. As we establish a spiritual foundation in our homes and teach our children to love God, our families



will be a testimony to the world. The Lord was not finished establishing “sons of promise” when Isaac was born or when Jesus came to our world. Even though the devil tries to stop the Lord, God continues to raise children of promise all over the earth.

III. THE SPIRITUAL FOUNDATION OF OUR CHILDREN

Just as Isaac was a child of promise to Abraham, we too have children of promise. Our sons and daughters are to be raised and educated to have faith in God. Abraham faced difficulties. He had to overcome obstacles and trust God. The Lord even moved him from a pagan land in order to help Abraham raise a son of promise.

We too will have challenges in raising children to fear the Lord. There are pagan influences all around us. It is not easy to teach your children to turn away from the allurements of the world when Satan places sinful attractions all around them. That is why it is so important to invest time every single day in communicating God’s love to your children.

The Spirit of Prophecy offers us much advice on how to strongly invest in our children’s spiritual foundation. Here are just a few helpful statements:

- “The Bible should be the child’s first textbook. From this book, parents are to give wise instruction. The Word of God is to be made the rule of the life. From it the children are to learn that God is their father, and from the beautiful lessons of His Word they are to gain a knowledge of His character” (*Child Guidance*, p. 41).
- “The parents are to teach their children lessons from the Bible, making them so simple that they can readily be understood” (*Child Guidance*, p. 43).
- “Every family should rear its altar of prayer, realizing that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom ... Fathers, mothers, you need to seek God morning and evening at the family altar, that you may learn how to teach your children wisely, tenderly, lovingly ... If ever there was a time when every house should be a house of prayer, it is now” (*Child Guidance*, p. 517).
- “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” (*Child Guidance*, p. 517).
- “Parents, you need to remember the Sabbath day yourselves to keep it holy. And if you do this, you are giving the proper instruction to your children; they will reverence God’s holy day ... The Sabbath of the Lord is to be made a blessing to us and to our children. They are to look upon the Sabbath as a day of delight, a day which God has sanctified; and they will so consider it if they are properly instructed” (*Child Guidance*, 527, 531).
- “Parents should make it their first business to understand the laws of life and health, which nothing shall be done by them in the preparation of food, or through any other habits, which will develop wrong tendencies in their children” (*Child Guidance*, p. 405).



- "Obedience to parental authority should be inculcated in babyhood and cultivated in youth" (*Child Guidance*, p. 82).
- "Very early the lesson of helpfulness should be taught the child. As soon as strength and reasoning power are sufficiently developed, he should be given duties to perform in the home" (*Child Guidance*, p. 36).

Regarding entertainment and leisure, parents should educate their children in the following way:

"Any amusement in which you can engage asking the blessing of God upon it in faith will not be dangerous. But any amusement which disqualifies you for secret prayer, for devotion at the altar of prayer, or for taking part in the prayer meeting is not safe, but dangerous" (*The Adventist Home*, p. 513).

CONCLUSION

The spiritual education of our children is the greatest investment a Christian parent can make on this earth. Fathers and mothers need to see their children as a treasure entrusted to them by God. Like Abraham we must teach our children that they are heirs of promise, sons and daughters of God. We must pass on to each of them a spiritual foundation that will make their faith in the Lord strong and sure.

What greater joy could a father have than to see his children living in the fear of God? What deeper happiness could a mother experience than to know that her children will grow up and pass along the faith of their childhood? This is how God's family grows.

Are you taking time each day to communicate God's love to your children? Even if you are busy, like the father in the story at the beginning of this sermon, do you show your children how much the heavenly Father loves them by communicating your own love and affection? You stand, as it were, in the place of God. And as you kiss your children and teach them to obey the Lord, you are passing along the knowledge that each of them is truly a child of God.

Have you made a commitment, like Abraham and Sarah, that you will accept the responsibility to teach your children to be heirs of this promise?

Author: *Pastor Jair Gois, West Central Brazil Union Mission*

Sermon 3 – What Can You Do for Your Parents?

"Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you" (Exodus: 20:12).

INTRODUCTION

An elderly man once moved into the home of his son and daughter-in-law. He could no longer care for himself and needed help. His hands would shake a lot, his vision was limited, and his steps were no longer sure. Each time the father and mother sat down with their four-year-old boy for meals, the grandfather joined them at the table. His shaky hands made it difficult to keep his beans from spilling on the table. He often spilled milk and dropped his utensils on the floor. Even the way he chewed his food was unpleasant.

One day the old man's son said to his wife, "I'm tired of the mess my dad makes every time we sit down to eat! Even the way he chews his food irritates me." So he decided to place a small table in a little room beside the kitchen. He also gave his father a wooden bowl since he had already broken several nice dishes. There the elderly man sat, eating alone. Occasionally the family would look over and see him with tears in his eyes as he sat by himself in silence. The only conversation he would hear from his son and daughter-in-law were angry comments when he spilled his food or dropped his fork. During all of this, the four-year-old boy watched quietly.

One day, just before lunch, the father noticed his little boy sitting off in a corner, working on something. He stepped closer and noticed him carving on a piece of wood. "What are you doing?" he asked his child. The boy gently replied, "Making a wooden bowl for you and mother to eat from when I grow up."

The father was stunned by his son's words and quickly left the room with tears in his eyes.

That night the father took the grandfather gently by the hand and led him back to the dinner table. From that day forward the old man ate every single meal with the rest of the family. Never again did the father or mother chastise the elderly man for spilling his food or breaking dishes.

I. THE ANSWER OF GOD

The title of this sermon is, "What can you do for your parents?" God answers this in a single verse of the Bible found in the Ten Commandments. Exodus 20:12 is found in the second part of the moral law. The first four commandments tell us how to love God. The last six commandments tell us how to love other people.

The very first commandment on loving others is found in verse 12: "Honor your father and your mother, so that you may live long in the land the LORD your God is giving you" (Exodus 20:12). Before all the other duties to human beings, the highest call is for children to honor their parents.

According to the Bible, parents represent God to their families. So when children honor their parents, they are honoring the Lord. Respecting our parents demonstrates our obedience to a legitimate authority established by God.

In the Hebrew culture, honoring parents was a matter of life and death (see Exodus 21:15, 17). The Mosaic laws determined that if a child tried to hurt his parents or even cursed them, he was liable to be stoned to death. Rebelling against your parents was not a small matter.

The Apostle Paul also emphasized the importance of this commandment in Ephesians 6:1-3 where he reminds us that this is the first commandment with a promise. Children who honored their parents would generally enjoy happy and long lives.

We can even see the importance of this law among various tribes of people that do not recognize all of God's Ten Commandments. Among some indigenous tribes from Rio Negro, in the Amazon section of Brazil, only two actions are considered sinful: disrespecting your parents and stealing. In fact, violation of either of these two can bring punishment by death.

Wise King Solomon strongly taught the importance of the fifth commandment and gave much advice on how children should honor their parents. Notice some of his sayings from the book of Proverbs:

- “A wise son heeds his father’s instruction, but a mocker does not respond to rebukes” (Proverbs 13:1).
- “A wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish son brings grief to his mother” (Proverbs 10:1).
- “Whoever robs their father and drives out their mother is a child who brings shame and disgrace” (Proverbs 19:26).
- “A discerning son heeds instruction, but a companion of gluttons disgraces his father” (Proverbs 28:7).
- “Whoever robs their father or mother and says, ‘It’s not wrong,’ is partner to one who destroys” (Proverbs 28:24).

So what can we do for our parents? God has already given us the answer. It’s found in the Bible: “Honor your father and mother.” One way children can do this is by remembering how much their parents have given for them, then do everything they can to give back to their parents.

II. THE ANSWER OF THE CHILDREN

What can children do for their parents? It’s a question all children need to think about.

The government of Minas Gerais in Brazil once provided a free concert for retirees. One of the musicians, a country music singer, sang a song called “The Leather Cape.” It tells of how children can sometimes unintentionally disrespect their parents later in life.

The lyrics begin: “There is an old story that still happens to this day. It is about a father who cares for ten children, but ten children who never care for their father.”

The song goes on to explain how an old cowboy moved in with his son. He was getting old and feeble and needed help. But his son’s wife, the daughter-in-law, goaded him to send the old man away or she would leave. So with a heavy heart, the son went to talk with his old man.

“My father, I’ve come to ask you to move out of my home today. But I leave you with this leather cape to cover you wherever you go to sleep.” The old man takes the piece of leather and leaves. As he walks away, the eight-year-old grandson runs to his grandfather and pulls on his coat. He is crying and doesn’t want his grandfather to leave. The old man is touched when the boy wants a piece of the leather to remember him. He pulls off the big cape and cuts it in two and hands half of it to the boy.

When the boy returns, his father asks him why he wanted a piece of his grandfather’s leather cape. The son replies, “Someday when you are old and I am married, will I need to send you away? Perhaps then I will give you this leather.”

How should we treat our parents? All children, young or old, need to wrestle with this question. The Bible tells us that when we honor our parents we are promised the blessing of a long life. The word “honor” means to show respect and consideration, to esteem, distinguish or acknowledge merits.

Someone once shared that the aforementioned promise of long life is two-fold. Not only are the children promised a long life but the parents who are honored by their children in their old age will have a better quality of life, which helps them to live longer.

Each of us should think carefully about how we treat our parents. God is asking us to reflect on the way we behave toward our father and mother. Even though parents are not perfect, God still asks us to honor them. Perhaps we need to forgive our parents for mistakes they have made. Just as we needed them when we were little, they need us when they grow old and feeble. They required patience with us when we were young. We need to be patient with them when they are elderly.

ILLUSTRATION

An elderly father sat with his adult son out in front of their home. It was a beautiful sunny day. The son was reading a newspaper while the aged father sat looking around. The old man had poor vision and was trying to make out some type of movement in the bushes. Finally he asked his son, "What is that?" The son paused, looked over in the bushes and calmly said, "It's just a bird." Then he picked up his newspaper and continued reading.

A moment later the older man once more saw something move near the house. Again he asked his son, "What is that?" The son, a little perturbed, once more puts down his newspaper and looks. "It's the same bird. It's just looking for food." With that he sighed and picked up his paper and resumed reading.

Once again the elderly man squints his eyes, trying to see what is in a tree behind him. For the third time he asks his son, "What is that?" This time the son is really annoyed. He throws his paper down and shouts at his father, "How many times do I have to tell you? It is a B-I-R-D!"

Suddenly the father gets up and walks into the house. The son asks, "Where are you going?" The old man waves him off, but then returns in a moment with an open diary in his hand. He gives it to his son and says, "Read this entry." The son is ashamed at his behavior, takes the diary, and reads what the father wrote many years ago.

It said, "Today my son turned three years old. I took him to the park where we sat together enjoying the sights. A bird flew close and landed. My son asked me 21 times in a row what it was. I was happy to hold my boy and tell him 21 times that it was a bird."

The son begins to cry as he finishes reading. He sets his father's diary down and throws his arms around his aged father, embracing him while apologizing for neglecting to show him honor.

CONCLUSION

Do you think there are times when it is appropriate to apologize to our parents for how we've treated them? They may forget kind things you have said to them, but they will never forget the different ways you have treated them. No matter what kind of a relationship you have with your parents, a part of you will miss them when they are gone.

Life at its best is not about receiving but about giving. Jesus taught that we are more blessed when we give to others than when we get for ourselves. So when it comes to our parents, are we "takers" or are we "givers"?

Some people listening to this sermon still have a chance to honor their parents. Some do not. For those who can still show love and respect to their father or mother, are you willing to make a commitment to keep the fifth commandment? Will you choose to express appreciation for all the good things your dad and mom have done for you?

Remember, the Bible says that those who honor their parents will enjoy long, happy lives. That promise is not just for our time on this earth, but will be continue to be true in the earth made new.

Author: *Pastor Jair Gois, West Central Brazil Union Mission*

Sermon 4 – Three Secrets to a Happy Marriage

“That is why a man leaves his father and mother and is united to his wife, and they become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24).

INTRODUCTION

A woman told her neighbor a secret. She explained that when she was first married, she and her husband had financial problems. But what made it even more difficult was when he would take money from her that was supposed to be used for household expenditures. Then she came up with a solution. She would hide this money so her husband could not find it. The neighbor lady asked, “And where do you hide the money?” The woman answered, “Inside the family Bible. I know it is safe there because he never opens it!”

Did you know there are other things hidden in the Bible? For instance:

- Secrets to marital happiness
- Solutions to family conflicts
- Answers to the problems between couples
- Duties and rights of marriage partners
- Guidelines for young couples who want to get married
- Methods for helping your home be a small slice of heaven on earth

All these topics are covered in the Bible. It is the best source of advice for a married couple to follow. With that in mind let’s look more closely at our opening text, Genesis 2:24. It contains three secrets for a happy marriage.

I. THE FIRST SECRET

The first part of Genesis 2:24 says, “That is why a man leaves his father and mother...” The first secret to a happy marriage is about leaving. God calls us to sacrifice old paths when we get married. There are things we must let go of in order to have a successful marriage.

For instance, if a man is divided between his mother and his wife, he will be a weak husband. He cannot satisfy the needs of his mother and his wife. Even if he tries, they would both be unhappy with him. A mother is like a man’s homeland. A wife is like a new country to which he moved. No one can live in two different countries at the same time. Though he may love both, he can only live in one place. When he gets married, he becomes a loyal citizen to a new nation—the country is called marriage.

God’s word teaches that a man is to have an intimate connection with his wife alone, above his parents and children. That doesn’t mean a man should no longer respect his parents. It does suggest that his wife is to be first in his affections. His first duty is to her.

The same is true for the wife. Her husband must have priority in her life. Consider the life of Adam and Eve. When they first came together, there were no other human beings on the planet. No neighbors, no children, no relatives, no in-laws—just each other. Their home was a priority, and we must guard our home circles and make our spouse a priority as well. Relatives may visit, but nothing comes between a husband and wife. If couples followed this advice, their pathway through life would be much smoother.

II. THE SECOND SECRET

The second secret found in Genesis 2:24 comes in the middle of the verse: "...and is united to his wife."

Being united in marriage happens on many different levels. One way a husband and wife can be in harmony is on the emotional level. Consider the following scenario: A married couple is driving down a street. They are on their way to a dinner engagement with friends. Since their friends live in a new home and they have never been there before, the wife is looking for the address on a map. She will offer her husband guidance on where to drive.

Before I finish this story I want to suggest that this situation provides many wonderful opportunities for a husband and wife to be united in heart. Now let's see what happens.

It is eight o'clock in the evening. Traffic is very busy and the couple is already late for this dinner. As they approach an intersection the husband asks, "Do I turn left or right?" She answers, "Left." He argues, "No, I think we should turn right." She is quiet and doesn't want to argue, especially since they are going to be with friends. So, the husband turns right instead of left. He immediately realizes he made a mistake.

He turns to his wife and says, "I'm sorry. You were right. I was wrong." She replies, "I forgive you. I suppose it's okay if we are a few minutes late." But then he says, "If you knew I was going to turn the wrong way, why didn't you insist a little bit more?" She replies, "If I have to choose between being right and being happy, I would rather choose being happy. We almost got into a big argument. I want our evening to be pleasant."

How much time and energy do we spend on trying to be right, or trying to prove that we are right? How often is it worth our time to insist on our own ways or prove our positions at the expense of emotional harmony? It would be good for us to stop and ask ourselves, "Am I more interested in being right or in being happy?"

Notice how Ellen White encourages us to be careful about how we should relate to the weaknesses of our spouse: "Let all seek to discover the excellencies rather than the defects. Often it is our own attitude, the atmosphere that surrounds ourselves, which determines what will be revealed to us in another" (*The Adventist Home*, p. 105).

Additionally, "However carefully and wisely marriage may have been entered into, few couples are completely united when the marriage ceremony is performed. The real union of the two in wedlock is the work of the afteryears" (*The Adventist Home*, p. 105).

We cannot be united with our spouse if we are primarily focused on being right and correcting them. We need to make efforts to understand the heart of our spouse. We need to be patient and understanding. We must let them discover some things on their own. We must be willing to forgive and let go of our ideas and consider the needs of the other. Such a union does not happen on the honeymoon. This type of character growth happens over a period of years.

III. THE THIRD SECRET

The last part of Genesis 2:24 gives us the third secret to a happy marriage: "...and they become one flesh." If we are to enjoy happiness in marriage, we must become "one flesh" with our spouse. But what does this mean? And how does this bring greater joy to our union? Notice some of the different ways people interpret this phrase:

1. One flesh means and husband and wife hold everything in common with each other. All their possessions belong to each other. All of their privileges and rights are subject to one another. All of their interests and cares are shared with each other. They live in unity of mind and heart.
2. One flesh speaks of the physical union between married couples that can result in having children.
3. One flesh describes a spiritual union in marriage. Together they represent God as if the two of them were one person. This is a union of souls.
4. One flesh simply means that this is a monogamous union between two people that is violated if a third person is included. The opposite of one flesh occurs when there is polygamy, illegitimate divorce, abuse, pornography, fornication, or adultery.

There is value and truth in all of the above definitions of "one flesh." Perhaps the one that is most often overlooked is the spiritual union of a couple with God. Imagine a triangle with God at the top point and each spouse at the other two angles.

If husband and wife stay in their respective places they would stay equally distant from God and from each other. Now if a husband moves sideways to his wife or if she moves sideways toward her husband it would appear they are becoming united, but they are still distant from God. Such a union expends lots of energy and is not truly satisfying.

However, when *both* husband and wife make it a priority to move closer to God, they will automatically move closer toward each other. As they move upward toward the Lord, the distance between them will become smaller. This will bring genuine unity. This is the secret to becoming one flesh. God is the true catalyst to bring happiness to a married couple.

Here is how Ellen White describes this unity: "Make Christ first and last and best in everything. Constantly behold Him, and your love for Him will daily become deeper and stronger as it is submitted to the test of trial. And as your love for Him increases, your love for each other will grow deeper and stronger" (*The Adventist Home*, p. 105).

Jesus captures this same point when He says, "But seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matt. 6:33). Someone once put it another way: "When all you have is God, you have everything you need." When we put the Lord first in our marriages, we will have all the happiness we could ever desire.

CONCLUSION

The story at the beginning of this sermon told about a wife who hid money in a Bible. We have found that there are many more treasures in the Word of God that help us to have happy marriages. Perhaps you have never looked to the Scriptures to find help for your marriage.

I would challenge all husbands and wives to spend time every day reading their Bibles. Meditate on Scripture passages. Memorize God's Word, morning and evening. Share what you learn with your spouse. Seek to understand how much God loves your family and wants you to be happy.

Pray for your marriage. Pray alone and pray together. Pray for your spouse and your children. And as you prayerfully study the Bible you will slowly be drawn closer to God and to your spouse.

Have you put these three secrets of a happy marriage into practice? Have you separated yourself from anything that would prevent you from being united with your spouse? Are you putting God first in your life? If not, then in the quietness of your heart, pray to Jesus right now. Say, "Dear Lord, I want to put you first in my life and I want to do everything I can to be united to my spouse. Please help me with this commitment."

If you practice these three secrets every day you will experience a level of happiness in your marriage you have never before known.

Author: *Pastor Jair Gois, West Central Brazil Union Mission*



Appendix C

Sign-up Sheet for *Family-to-Family*

Family-to-Family Enrollment Form

"It is our commitment as a family to be a witness for Jesus to our neighbors during the coming year."

No.	Date	Family Name (<i>everyone in each family sign their name</i>)
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Appendix D

Copy of the *Family Guide*

Introduction

Everyone can see that families in our world are under attack. We are inundated with stories and statistics regarding high divorce rates, domestic violence, rebellious children, pornography, and babies born to unwed parents. New research continues to emphasize an old problem: Homes are falling to pieces. Communities are populated with overwhelmed single parents, angry teens, neglected children, etc. And no culture is untouched by these results of broken families.

The entertainment industry is not helping. Television programs, movies, videos, magazines, and books make it seem normal and almost trendy to loosen our grip on the values that make solid homes. If good families were to be compared to a sapling, Satan and his host of evil angels are chopping at the roots of the family tree in order to topple down forests of marriages.

We know the family is in trouble. But have we stopped to consider the powerful witness of a positive, Christian family? It's easy to see the dark side, with the broken pieces of deteriorated families all around us. But what can church families do to help struggling homes in our communities to heal and grow? How can we introduce more of our relatives, friends, and neighbors to the Savior who loves families? Is there something we have overlooked in reaching disintegrating homes for God in our communities?

There is. Nothing is more powerful to reach floundering families and troubled people than a Christian home. When church families reach out to community families, Satan trembles—because God created families to be the influential building blocks of society. Imperfect as our homes might be, the world looks longingly for safe places for children to grow, for examples of purity and integrity, and for family units that stand against the tide of evil in our world.

The witnessing power of one single Christian family in a neighborhood is beyond estimation. We fear the evil influences of a bad family on a good family, but with proper boundaries it would be well for us to also think about the good influence a Christian home can have on those around us. Through the work of the Holy Spirit, a solid home can change a community.

Notice how Ellen White describes the powerful witness of a Christian home:

“A well-ordered Christian household is a powerful argument in favor of the reality of the Christian religion—an argument that the infidel cannot gainsay. All can see that there is an influence at work in the family that affects the children, and that the God of Abraham is with them. If the homes of professed Christians had a right religious mold, they would exert a mighty influence for good. They would indeed be the ‘light of the world’”
(*The Adventist Home*, p. 36).

Family-to-Family is a one-year church plan, provided by the Department of Family Ministries of the



General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, to guide all the families in the church to witness to their neighbors as a family. It fosters a harmonious work between the departments of the church and the family units of the church to reach out to families in the community.

This *Family Guide* is a booklet to help your family be a powerful witness in the community. It contains steps to help spiritually prepare your family to share Christ with another family.

If the devil has made it a high priority to destroy families because of their power for good in the world, then perhaps it is time the church made it a high priority to build families as witnessing teams to transform our societies—not only from person to person, but from family to family. It is an exponential plan that is blessed by the Holy Spirit.

Is your family ready to be a mighty influence for good? Are you prepared to be a powerful light in the world?

How to Use This *Family Guide*

Introduction

Family-to-Family (sometimes referred to as FTF) is a plan that makes the family the center of all evangelistic work in your church. It helps your family witness to at least one family in the community by building friendships, meeting needs, and inviting families to learn more about Jesus through Bible studies and evangelistic meetings.

As you follow the plans in this guide, use wise judgment and be flexible. Some activities may not work as well in your culture or community. Reach out in ways to meet the unique needs in your neighborhood. And most of all, pray for families in your community who need to know how much Jesus loves them and that He is coming back to take all God's people to a heavenly home.

The implementation plan for *Family-to-Family* happens in three phases over the period of roughly one year.

Phase 1: Prepare

This first part seeks to begin preparing each person's heart to be a witness for Christ. This phase takes place over a 2-month period. During this phase your family is encouraged to listen to a sermon series on the family, enroll in the FTF program, receive *Family Guide*, begin praying for other families in your neighborhood, and start reading daily family devotions found in *Family Guide*.

Phase 2: Care

The purpose of the second part is to help your family begin making sincere connections and building friendships with at least one other family in their neighborhood. Relationships take time to build, so this timeframe is longer than the others. This phase takes place over a 6-month period. During this time your family will be invited to participate in a day of fasting and prayer, choose one family to contact, begin building a friendship with that family, share resources with them, and invite them to church events.

Phase 3: Share

The purpose of this final part is to share the gospel. Church families invite neighborhood families to attend an evangelistic meeting. This phase takes place over a 4-month period and encourages everyone to eventually be involved in small group Bible studies to foster continued growth in

Christ. During this time your family will continue to build friendships with community family(ies), invite them to an evangelistic series and attend the series with them, and then help them continue to grow in Christ.

This *Family Guide* has three sections to help your family participate in the program.

1. **A Prayer Journal** provides a place for your family to write down the names of families in your neighborhood that you will pray for.
2. **Daily Devotionals** give you one month of family devotionals to read with your family. When you are finished with these, please continue having family worship using other materials of choice.
3. **Monthly Steps** outline things you can do each month in the program.

God bless your family as you become a light in your community!

Prayer Journal

In this Prayer Journal we encourage you to write down the names of your neighbors so you can begin praying for them. Include the names of their children as well. Pray for them each day by name. You may start with one or two of your neighbors and later on add more names.

Pray for God to lead your family to be a shining light in your neighborhood. Ask the Lord to guide you to the family or families He would like you to contact. Pray for courage, humility and follow-through in making these contacts. At some point in the FTF program you will be encouraged to reach out in friendship to a family on this list. Which family (or families) will it be?

Take time to write down any additional requests and answers to prayer for these families. At some point these families may want you to pray about a problem they are facing. Earnestly lift up each family in prayer before the Lord who loves all families!

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

"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened" (Matt. 7:7, 8, NKJV).

<u>Date Asked</u>	<u>Prayer Request</u>	<u>Date Answered</u>
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____
_____	_____	_____

Monthly Steps

Phase 1: Prepare

Month 1

- ☐ Listen to sermon series on the family and look at an overview of the *Family-to-Family* (FTF) program (use Appendix A as a handout).
- ☐ Enroll in the program.
- ☐ Receive a *Family Guide* booklet (one per family).

Month 2

- ☐ Begin using the daily devotionals in *Family Guide*.
- ☐ Write down the names of families in your neighborhood and begin praying for them each day in the prayer journal section of your *Family Guide*. Please note: the families in your prayer journal do not need to be in your immediate neighborhood. They might be families in your larger community—families you know from work, from your children's activities, or through other acquaintances. However, the families you choose do need to be close enough for you to have regular contact with them.
- ☐ Pray especially for God to help you choose one family to which you will witness.
- ☐ Participate in the day of fasting and prayer, asking God to help your family be a witness for Jesus to your neighbors.

Phase 2: Care

Month 3

- ☐ Continue morning and evening devotions with your family and keep praying for all the families in your prayer journal.
- ☐ Choose one community family that you will focus on reaching. Share that name with the FTF committee.
- ☐ Attend the training seminar on how to build friendships with families in your community.
- ☐ Make your first contact with the family you've chosen. Bring a simple gift, such as a loaf of bread or batch of cookies, and spend some time getting acquainted.

Month 4

- ☐ Continue morning and evening devotions with your family and keep praying for all the families in your prayer journal.
- ☐ Visit your one community family and continue building a sincere and caring friendship. Offer them a brochure that might interest them.



- ☐ Attend the once-a-month FTF meeting for continued support and encouragement.

Month 5

- ☐ Continue morning and evening devotions with your family and keep praying for all the families in your prayer journal.
- ☐ Visit your one community family and continue building a sincere and caring friendship. Offer them a brochure on a topic that might interest them, such as health or a Family Ministries theme. Try inviting them to an upcoming church event.
- ☐ Attend the monthly FTF meeting for continued support and encouragement.

Month 6

- ☐ Continue morning and evening devotions with your family and keep praying for all the families in your prayer journal.
- ☐ Visit your one community family and continue building a sincere and caring friendship. Offer them a brochure on a topic that might interest them, such as health or a Family Ministries theme. Try inviting them to an upcoming church event.
- ☐ Look for ways you can be a blessing to the family you've chosen. Perhaps they have a special need in their home (extra help with babysitting, assistance with yard work, a ride to the doctor's office, etc.).
- ☐ Attend the monthly FTF meeting for continued support and encouragement.

Month 7

- ☐ Continue morning and evening devotions with your family and keep praying for all the families in your prayer journal.
- ☐ Ask God to lead you in making contacts this month. Here are three ways to reach out:
 - ☐ Visit the family you've chosen and continue to build a friendship. Offer them a brochure on a topic that might interest them, such as health or a Family Ministries theme. Try inviting them to an upcoming church event.
 - ☐ Look for more ways you can be a blessing to your outreach family, such as extra help with babysitting, assistance with yard work, swapping recipes, etc.).
 - ☐ Ask if you can pray for or with them, or if they have a prayer request.
 - ☐ Prayerfully listen for ways to share your faith through a testimony, piece of literature, or an invitation to a Bible study in your home or theirs.
- ☐ Attend the monthly FTF meeting for continued support and encouragement.

Month 8

- ☐ Continue morning and evening devotions with your family and keep praying for all the families in your prayer journal.

- ☐ Visit the family you've chosen and continue to build a sincere and caring friendship. Offer them a brochure on a topic that might interest them, such as health or a Family Ministries theme. Try inviting them to an upcoming church event.
- ☐ Look for more ways you can be a blessing to the family you've chosen, such as extra help with babysitting, assistance with yard work, carpooling, etc.).
- ☐ Prayerfully listen for ways to share your faith through a testimony, piece of literature, or an invitation to a Bible study in your home or theirs.
- ☐ Attend the monthly FTF meeting for continued support and encouragement.

Phase 3: Share

Month 9

- ☐ Continue having morning and evening devotions with your family and keep praying for all the families in your prayer journal.
- ☐ Visit the family you've chosen and continue to build a sincere and caring friendship. Offer them a brochure on a topic that might interest them, such as health or a Family Ministries theme. Try inviting them to an upcoming church event.
- ☐ Look for more ways you can be a blessing to the family you've chosen, such as extra help with babysitting, assistance with yard work, or just lending an ear).
- ☐ Offer to begin Bible readings or Bible studies in your neighbor's home or in your own home.
- ☐ Attend the monthly FTF meeting for continued support and encouragement.

Month 10

- ☐ Continue morning and evening devotions with your family and keep praying for all the families in your prayer journal.
- ☐ Personally invite the family you've chosen to the upcoming evangelistic series.
- ☐ If you are holding Bible studies in your home (or in their home), temporarily stop the studies and attend the evangelistic meetings. After the series is over you can resume your Bible study.
- ☐ Attend the monthly FTF meeting for continued support and encouragement.
- ☐ Participate in another day of fasting in prayer in preparation for the upcoming evangelistic series.

Month 11

- ☐ Continue morning devotions with your family (the evangelistic series can be your evening devotions) and keep praying for all the families in your prayer journal.
- ☐ Attend the evangelistic series with your neighbors. And even if they do not come, attend and support the evangelistic series yourself.

- ☐ If you are holding Bible studies in your home (or in their home), temporarily stop the studies and attend the evangelistic meetings. After the series is over you can resume your Bible study.
- ☐ There is no FTF meeting during the evangelistic series.

Month 12

- ☐ Continue morning and evening devotions with your family and keep praying for all the families in your prayer journal.
- ☐ Attend baptisms, banquet, and testimony service, whether or not your neighbors were baptized. Show support to all new members.
- ☐ Resume Bible studies in your home or your neighbor's home to help establish new members in their faith, or to encourage people who have not yet made a commitment to keep growing and learning.
- ☐ Begin praying for the Lord to reveal whom your family should focus on next to make friends for Jesus.

Daily Devotionals

1-SECRETS OF A HAPPY HOME

"And Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding" (John 2:2).

The dream of every human being is to have a solid, happy home. Many people take great measures to establish a strong marriage. We choose the person we think is ideal, the companion with whom we will share all the special moments of our life. We want everything to come together precisely as planned because our happiness is at risk. But gradually, many couples have seen their castles fall down. What should have been a dream can soon become a nightmare that destroys and hurts, resulting in wounds that may never heal.



In the wedding at Cana in Galilee we find three secrets for a successful marriage. The first secret is clear in verse two, which says: "... Jesus was also invited." Many couples are worried about all the details of a wedding ceremony but forget the basics—to invite Jesus to be part of the marriage. The best relationships in the world involve three people: God, the husband, and the wife. The presence of Jesus in our wedding does not assure that we will never have any problems, but it does assure us we will have the power to manage our homes.

In verse five of John 2 we find the second secret: "Do whatever He tells you." If we had in ourselves the predisposition to leave our will subordinate to the will of Jesus we would scarcely think about doing what pleases *our* hearts, but what pleases the heart of God. And if we wonder, "What exactly is the Lord asking me to do?" we will find the answer in the Word of God. To husbands, the Bible says, "Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her" (Eph. 5:25). To wives, God calls, "Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord" (verse 22). The woman will give her love, kindness, and affection in submission to her own husband. To parents, Jesus asks, "Fathers, do not exasperate your children" (Eph. 6:4). And, finally, to children comes this guidance: "Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right" (verse 1).

The third secret is to develop a living and active relationship. Notice what John 2:6, 7 says: "Nearby stood six stone water jars, the kind used by the Jews for ceremonial washing, each holding from twenty to thirty gallons. Jesus said to them: 'Fill the jars with water'; So they filled them to the brim." These jars were to always be filled with water, ready to be used for the service of purifying the home. The fact that the jars were empty shows that home religion was not being cultivated. The empty jars pointed to an empty religion.

Unfortunately we must admit that in many professed-Christian homes these three secrets are not being consistently followed. The results are broken families, neglected children, resentment, and misery. Jesus desires to be present in your home, just as He was at the wedding in Cana. Will you invite Him to come in?

Pastor Juracy Santiago Castelo - Central Brazil Conference

2-FAMILIES TO REFLECT THE GOODNESS OF GOD

"As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those that fear Him" (Psalm 103:13).

Bring the sunshine of heaven into your conversation. By speaking words that encourage and cheer, you will reveal that the sunshine of Christ's righteousness dwells in your soul. Children need pleasant words. It is essential to their happiness to feel approval resting upon them. Strive to overcome harshness of expression, and cultivate soft tones. Catch the beauty contained in the lessons of God's Word, and cherish this as essential to the happiness and success of your home life. In a happy environment the children will develop dispositions that are sweet and sunshiny.

True beauty of character is not something that shines out only on special occasions; the grace of Christ dwelling in the soul is revealed under all circumstances. He who cherishes this grace as an abiding presence in the life will reveal beauty in character under trying as well as under easy circumstances. In the home, in the world, in the church, we are to live the life of Christ. There are souls all around in need of conversion. When the law of God is written upon the heart, and is

witnessed to in a holy character, those who know not the power of the grace of Christ will be led to desire it, and will be converted.

A solemn review is now taking place in the courts above. The thought of the decisions now being made in heaven should urge parents to diligence in training their children in the fear and love of God. Not by severe words and punishment for wrongdoing will the most be accomplished, but by watchfulness and prayer, lest they be taken by the snares of the enemy. ...

Every family that has a knowledge of the truth for this time, is to make it known to others. The Lord's people are to get ready for the doing of a special work. The children as well as the older members of the family are to act their part in seeking to save those who are perishing. From His youth Christ was, to all with whom He associated, an influence that drew them toward higher things. So the youth today may exert a power for good that will draw souls to God.

Parents need to appreciate more fully the responsibility and honor that God has placed upon them, in making them, to the child, the representative of Himself. The character revealed in the contact of daily life will interpret to the child, for good or for evil, those words of God:

"Like as a father pitieth his children, so the Lord pitieth them that fear him." "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you."

—Ellen G. White, *Our Father Cares*, p. 298, 299

3—EDEN, THE FIRST HOME

"...The Lord God ... made ... a woman, and brought her unto the man Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh" (Gen. 2:22-24, KJV).

God celebrated the first marriage. Thus the institution has for its originator the Creator of the universe. "Marriage is honourable" (Hebrews 13:4); it was one of the first gifts of God to man, and it is one of the two institutions that, after the Fall, Adam brought with him beyond the gates of Paradise. When the divine principles are recognized and obeyed in this relation, marriage is a blessing; it guards the purity and happiness of the race, it provides for man's social needs, it elevates the physical, the intellectual, and the moral nature...

The home of our first parents was to be a pattern for other homes as their children should go forth to occupy the earth. That home, beautified by the hand of God Himself, was not a gorgeous palace... but... a garden. This was his dwelling... In the surroundings of the holy pair was a lesson for all time—that true happiness is found, not in the indulgence of pride and luxury, but in communion with God through His created works. If men would give less attention to the artificial, and would cultivate greater simplicity, they would come far nearer to answering the purpose of God in their creation. Pride and ambition are never satisfied, but those who are truly wise will find substantial and elevating pleasure in the sources of enjoyment that God has placed within the reach of all.

To the dwellers in Eden was committed the care of the garden, "to dress it and to keep it." Their occupation was not wearisome, but pleasant and invigorating. God appointed labor as a blessing to man, to occupy his mind, to strengthen his body, and to develop his faculties. In mental and physical activity Adam found one of the highest pleasures of his holy existence... In mental and physical activity Adam found one of the highest pleasures of his holy existence... The holy pair

were not only children under the fatherly care of God but students receiving instruction from the all-wise Creator... The order and harmony of creation spoke to them of infinite wisdom and power. They were ever discovering some attraction that filled their hearts with deeper love and called forth fresh expressions of gratitude.

So long as they remained loyal to the divine law, their capacity to know, to enjoy, and to love would continually increase. They would be constantly gaining new treasures of knowledge, discovering fresh springs of happiness, and obtaining clearer and yet clearer conceptions of the immeasurable, unfailing love of God.—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 46-51.

—Ellen G. White, *Reflecting Christ*, p. 166

4-ABRAHAM OBEYED GOD'S VOICE

"Because Abraham obeyed My voice and kept My charge, My commandments, My statutes, and My laws" (Gen. 26:5).

[Abraham's] own example, the silent influence of his daily life, was a constant lesson. The unswerving integrity, the benevolence and unselfish courtesy, which had won the admiration of kings, were displayed in the home. There was a fragrance about the life, a nobility and loveliness of character, which revealed to all that he was connected with Heaven. He did not neglect the soul of the humblest servant. In his household there was not one law for the master and another for the servant; a royal way for the rich and another for the poor. All were treated with justice and compassion, as inheritors with him of the grace of life.

"He will command his... household." There would be no sinful neglect to restrain the evil propensities of his children, no weak, unwise, indulgent favoritism; no yielding of his conviction of duty to the claims of mistaken affection. Abraham would not only give right instruction, but he would maintain the authority of just and righteous laws.

How few there are in our day who follow this example! On the part of too many parents there is a blind and selfish sentimentalism, miscalled love, which is manifested in leaving children, with their unformed judgment and undisciplined passions, to the control of their own will. This is the veriest cruelty to the youth, and a great wrong to the world. Parental indulgence causes disorder in families and in society. This is the veriest cruelty to the youth, and a great wrong to the world. Parental indulgence causes disorder in families and in society. It confirms in the young the desire to follow inclination, instead of submitting to the divine requirements. Thus they grow up with a heart averse to doing God's will, and they transmit their irreligious, insubordinate spirit to their children and children's children. Like Abraham, parents should command their households after them. Let obedience to parental authority be taught and enforced as the first step in obedience to the authority of God...

Those who seek to lessen the claims of God's holy law are striking directly at the foundation of the government of families and nations. Religious parents, failing to walk in His statutes, do not command their household to keep the way of the Lord. The law of God is not made the rule of life. The children, as they make homes of their own, feel under no obligation to teach their children what they themselves have never been taught. And this is why there are so many godless families...

Not until parents themselves walk in the law of the Lord with perfect hearts will they be prepared to command their children after them. A reformation in this respect is needed—a reformation which shall be deep and broad.—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 142, 143.

—Ellen G. White, *Reflecting Christ*, p. 194

5—COURAGEOUS WOMEN IN TIMES OF CRISIS

“For if you remain silent at this time, relief and deliverance for the Jews will arise from another place, but you and your father’s family will perish. And who knows but that you have come to your royal position for such a time as this?” (Esther 4:14).

In today’s passage the role of a woman is portrayed in a big way during a time of crisis. Israel was about to be destroyed because of the envy of Haman. Apparently there was no solution, but God raised up a sensitive and wise woman named Esther who presented herself before the king and interceded for her people. Queen Esther is an example of Jesus, who also intercedes for God’s children.

In the book of Judges we find the examples of other women, who in times of crisis revealed themselves to be stronger than men. Deborah is the first of them. She was a judge in Israel, and apart from being a dedicated wife and mother, she received sons who also judged God’s people.

During this time, Jabin, King of Canaan, sent Sisera, to fight against the chosen people. Then the figure of Deborah appears majestic in Israel’s history. She called Barak, the commander of God’s army and sent him to battle, but Barak feared and said to the judge: “If you go with me, I will go; but if you don’t go with me, I won’t go.” Then Deborah said: “Certainly I will go with you, but because of the course you are taking, the honor will not be yours, for the LORD will deliver Sisera into the hands of a woman.”

The battle was victorious to Israel but Barak was not the great winner. Actually, Sisera, the enemy’s commander, fled, but he fell on the hands of a woman named Jael. In a critical moment Jael made a wise decision to protect the people of Israel.

During Christ’s final moments another woman appears, a woman who faced a crisis without fear. Mary, that poor sinner who found forgiveness and grace in Jesus, was the last person to leave Calvary and the first to go to the tomb.

Where did these women find courage and wisdom to face moments of crisis? Let us ask Mary Magdalene and she would say that she was far from Jesus and her life was full of failures and frustrations. But one day she found the secret to victory at the feet of Jesus. There you can see her, sitting at Jesus’ feet while her sister, Martha, is rushing around. You can see her again, anointing the Master’s feet with her tears, while others are enjoying a feast. Once more you can see her at the foot of the cross while others flee. It is from Jesus, from the cross, that Mary, Deborah, Esther and other women found strength to face crisis moments. And it is there that women and men today may find the necessary power to face the stormy times that will come.

—Alejandro Bullon, *More Like Jesus*, p. 218

6-HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR MARRIAGE

"Love one another deeply, from the heart" (1 Peter 1:22).

A couple was celebrating their 50th wedding anniversary. The local newspaper sent a reporter to interview them. The husband was at home alone at the time, so the reporter asked him, "What is the recipe for a happy and lasting marriage?"

"Well, I will tell young man", said the old husband slowly, "Sarah was my first and only girlfriend. When she thought we ought to get married, I trembled. Then, after the wedding her father asked to speak with me privately. He handed me a small package and said, 'Here is everything you really need to know to have a happy marriage.' Inside the box was a gold watch." He held the watch up for the reporter to see. Then he held it closer so the man could read what was etched on the face of the watch. It said, "Say something kind to Sarah today!" The old man smiled and said, "It was very simple, but it really worked."

Here are five more recipes to improve your marriage. As you read these, remember, no home is perfect, no marriage is without fault. All couples have their unique challenges. What is most important is to focus on making each other happy.

1. Do not compare your marriage with other marriages. Treat your marriage as a unique relationship. All marriages have challenges. Keep Jesus as your standard.
2. Review your marriage goals on a regular basis. Where are you falling short? You should do this at least once a year. What area needs improvement? Where do you have conflict? How much time do you spend together?
3. Talk to each other. It is not enough to be together. Someone once said that without television commercials people would never talk to each other. A wife once complained that she did not have enough time to resolve problems with her husband because television commercials were too short!
4. Manage your finances together. The three biggest problems in a typical marriage are money, sex, and in-laws. Financial problems are much greater than you might think. It is important to set a budget and follow it. Money is a very sensitive area of conflict in a lot of marriages.
5. Share affectionate words with each other. Remember the kind notes and cards from your dating years? Keep giving to your spouse loving words. Compliment her hairstyle, his tie, the food, the work... If there is genuine love, it will be shown in our words and actions. Repeating tender words helps keep the romance alive. Say "I love you" often and then seal it with a heartfelt kiss!

Remember the words in our opening Bible verse: "Love one another deeply, from the heart!" (1 Peter 1:22).

—Moysés S. Nigri, *Walking with God Every Day*, p. 345



7-LONG LIFE PROMISED FOR HONORING PARENTS

"Honour thy father and thy mother: that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee" (Ex. 20:12, KJV).

Those who would truly follow Christ must let Him abide in the heart, and enthrone Him there as supreme. They must represent His spirit and character in their home life, and show courtesy and kindness to those with whom they come in contact. There are many children who profess to know the truth, who do not render to their parents the honor and affection that are due to them, who manifest but little love to father and mother, and fail to honor them in deferring to their wishes, or in seeking to relieve them of anxiety.

Many who profess to be Christians do not know what it means to "honour thy father and thy mother," and consequently will know just as little what it means, "that thy days may be long upon the land which the Lord thy God giveth thee." Exodus 20:12. ... The Heart-searcher knows what is your attitude toward your parents; for He is weighing moral character in the golden scales of the heavenly sanctuary. O, confess your neglect of your parents, confess your indifference toward them, and your contempt of God's holy commandment.

Parents are entitled to a degree of love and respect which is due to no other person. God Himself, who has placed upon them a responsibility for the souls committed to their charge, has ordained that during the earlier years of life, parents shall stand in the place of God to their children. And he who rejects the rightful authority of his parents, is rejecting the authority of God. The fifth commandment requires the children not only to yield respect, submission, and obedience to their parents, but also to give them love and tenderness, to lighten their cares, to guard their reputation, and to succor and comfort them in old age.

The fifth commandment is binding upon children as long as their own lives and the lives of their parents are spared.

-Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 60

8-JESUS' RECIPE FOR A HAPPY MARRIAGE

"Nearby stood six stone water jars... Jesus said to the servants, 'Fill the jars with water'; so they filled them to the brim" (John 2:6, 7).

There was a crisis at a wedding Jesus attended. It was the custom to always serve the best wine first, and then serve the inferior wine. When Jesus turned the water from those six water jars into the best wine anyone had ever tasted, the wedding party was amazed. This was unusual. It was an important lesson for the newly married couple and for us today. Most newlyweds put their best energies (like new wine) into the first part of their marriage. But after the years go by and problems arise, their efforts become weak (like old wine). Christ wanted to show that, with Him, a marriage is good in the beginning, but will be even better in the end. Based on this Bible story, here is a plan for a happy marriage.

The most important jar to fill in a marriage is the jar of love. Genuine love is essential for a happy marriage. Physical attraction is temporary. Appearance and beauty are not the foundation of happy marriage. True love is based in mutual understanding, companionship and spiritual affinity. Love is also based on respect and esteem for our partner. When both show honor to the other, there will be a good foundation for marriage.

When we are close to Christ there is no fear, but love. God will give us the ability to love. When we are far from Christ there cannot be a divine, deep and real love between two people. Yes, we can love each other, but when we give our lives to Christ, God pours into our hearts a greater ability to love, an unknown deeper dimension.

Robert Burns re-wrote 1 Corinthians 13. His paraphrase reads: "My home could be filled with worldly riches, but if does not have love it will be an empty shell. My home could be place where intelligent people meet, but if does not have love it will just be a noisy house. My home could send letters to important government officials, it could fight for the welfare of all humanity, but if does not have love, its influence would soon disappear. The spirit of a true home is very patient and kind. It does not envy, it does not march in parades, it does not boast, it is never offended, or selfish, or angered. It has no resentment. A loving home never is happy when it hears of sadness in another home. It is always careful to not mention the private problems in other homes. It is always anxious to believe the best, is always hopeful, and is always tolerating! The home will never disappear. Civilizations will vanish; knowledge will become obsolete and institutions will cease. For now we know little and we see only a glimmering future, but when the true home spirit guides the affairs of the world, then God's perfect kingdom will be established. Now, may these three continue forever in our homes: faith, hope and love. The greatest of these is love!"

Each day we should fill to the brim jars of heaven's love. If we did this, love in our marriages would never run dry.

"Those who truly delight in the love of God will have joy and peace" (Ellen G. White, *The Faith I Live By*, p. 237).

– Léo Ranzolin, *Jesus, the Morning Dew*, p. 181

9-REBEKAH: THE DIVINE CHOICE

"But [you] will go to my country and my own relatives and get a wife for my son Isaac" (Gen. 24:4).

Despite the great number of divorces around the world, men and women continue to seek a companion for life. When they are teenagers, young people start to look for someone to bring them happiness. The example we should take when choosing a partner is found in Abraham's experience when he was looking for a wife for his son Isaac.

In those days parents decided the marriage. I remember, as an example, my visit to a school in Parane, Tanzania. One Sunday, while the young people having fun at a church social, a teacher directed my attention to two youth: "Pastor, those two are contracted for marriage. Their parents have agreed that as soon as they graduate they are going to get married." Like this couple, Abraham watched over his son and wanted for him a true partner for life from his own people. He asked his servant Eliezer to find a wife for Isaac. When Eliezer left, he was sure that the angel of God would guide him to the one who would be Isaac's future wife. Abraham told Eliezer that God would send His angel before him.

After a long journey, the tired traveler waits in Nahor's vicinity for the young women to come to the spring for water. There Eliezer says a beautiful prayer to the Lord and asks God for a sign. He requests that the woman who accepts his request for water would be the one chosen by God for Isaac.

The story is fascinating! Rebekah, whom the Bible describes as “very beautiful”, comes to the spring carrying a jar on her shoulder. After she fills the jar with water, Eliezer approaches her and asks: “Please give me a little water from your jar” (Gen. 24:17). Rebekah replies: “Drink, my lord” (verse 18). Then she gives water to Eliezer and to all his camels.

Rebekah was a dedicated, polite and hospitable young woman. When she hears about Eliezer’s mission, she invites him to rest in her father’s house. It is important to remember that not only were Abraham and Eliezer praying, even Isaac was praying and meditating (see verse 63). Choosing a life partner demands much prayer. Parents and children should both seek the Lord’s approval in finding a young Christian man or woman who would become a dedicated partner in the Lord.

Rebekah understood Eliezer’s mission. She also wanted to marry someone who loved God! When Laban, her brother, said: “Will you go with this man?” she replied: “I will go!” (Gen. 24:58). The later says that when Isaac received Rebekah from Eliezer’s hands, “he loved her.”

“True love is a high and holy principle, altogether different in character from that love which is awakened by impulse and which suddenly dies when severely tested” (Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 176).

– Léo Ranzolin, *Jesus, the Morning Dew*, p. 59

10–JOB OFFERED SACRIFICES FOR HIS CHILDREN

“And it was so, when the days of their feasting were gone about, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all: for Job said, It may be that my sons have sinned, and cursed God in their hearts. Thus did Job continually” (Job 1:5, KJV).

There are two ways to deal with children—ways that differ widely in principle and in results. Faithfulness and love, united with wisdom and firmness, in accordance with the teachings of God’s Word, will bring happiness in this life and in the next. Neglect of duty, injudicious indulgence, failure to restrain or correct the follies of youth, will result in unhappiness and final ruin to the children, and disappointment and anguish to the parents. ...

It were well for parents to learn from the man of Uz a lesson of steadfastness and devotion. Job did not neglect his duty to those outside of his household; he was benevolent, kind, thoughtful of the interests of others; and at the same time he labored earnestly for the salvation of his own family. Amid the festivities of his sons and daughters, he trembled lest his children should displease God. As a faithful priest of the household, he offered sacrifices for them individually. He knew the offensive character of sin, and the thought that his children might forget the divine claims, led him to God as an intercessor in their behalf.



He desires to see gathered out from the homes of our people a large company of youth who, because of the godly influences of their homes, have surrendered their hearts to Him and go forth to give Him the highest service of their lives. Directed and trained by the godly instruction of the home, the influence of the morning and evening worship, the consistent example of parents who love and fear God, they have learned to submit to God as their teacher and are prepared to render Him acceptable service as loyal sons and daughters. Such youth are prepared to represent to the world the power and grace of Christ.

–Ellen G. White, *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 257

11–LOVE IN THE HOME

“Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her” (Eph. 5:25).

There are husbands whose marital relationships are restricted to what is read in Ephesians 5:22: “Wives, submit yourselves to your own husbands as you do to the Lord.” They forget that in the study of Scriptures a verse should never be separated from its context. That is when we consider the whole passage, verses 22 to 33, where there is a harmonious vision of the principles that contribute to a happy Christian marriage.

There wouldn’t be any problem for women to submit to their husbands, if husbands loved their wives, “as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her.” In a Christian home, the husband’s authority is not something imposed by force, but he gains it with love, a devotion reaching to the highest sacrifice, as Christ’s love.

The problem in many homes is not the lack of love, but the lack of loving expressions, showed in kind words and gestures. A sad story of a husband who lost his wife after fifty years of marriage illustrates this point. After the funeral was over, the pastor sat down to talk with this man.

“John,” asked the pastor, “Mary was a good wife, was not she?”

“Yes,” replied John.

“You loved her, isn’t that true, John?”

“Yes, pastor. Mary was a wonderful woman. I loved her. And I almost told her so.”

Unfortunately, this story shows what happens in many homes. It is mistakenly assumed that our spouse knows how much we love them, but nothing is mentioned about it. An affectionate word, a sign of love would do much to remove the atmosphere of confusion that is in many homes. With the lack of expression, love is like a fragile plant and will grow weak. Today is the day to show our sincere affection to your spouse. Tomorrow could be too late.

Listen to this precious advice: “Make the home a Bethel, a holy, consecrated place. Keep the soil of the heart mellow by the manifestation of love and affection” (Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 114).

–Siegfried J. Schwantes, *Closer to God*, p. 124

12-EDUCATING CHILDREN

"Your wife will be like a fruitful vine within your house; your children will be like olive shoots around your table" (Psalm 128:3).

Samuel Taylor Coleridge was talking to a lady who defended the idea that children should not have religious instruction; they must be left to grow "naturally", so they would be more mature; make rational decisions, for they would know better what they are doing. This philosophy seems plausible, but certain things might seem plausible and yet constitute a misconception.

Coleridge listened as that woman was talking, and did not say much. Then he invited her to walk around the garden. He guided her to a place in the garden where weeds grow. "What do you think of my garden?" asked the poet. "Isn't it beautiful?"

"A garden? Do you call this a garden? I would say it is a place to grow weeds," she replied.

"Well," explained Coleridge, "A few months ago I decided to let them grow the way they wanted, until they reach maturity." Suddenly his visitor understood the point.

I had relatives who supported this laissez-faire philosophy of parenting. It was no surprise when their children did not adopt any religion when they became adults. The parents seemed to have forgotten that they once defended and practiced this philosophy. Today they regret the fact that their children joke about religion and do not have a moral conscientiousness. They rebel against all authority.

Teaching Christian principles to our children does not guarantee that they will adopt them. After all, human beings were created with the power to choose and some, unfortunately, make the wrong choice (see Josh. 24:15 and Rom. 14:12). But a convenient education increases the possibilities. If, despite Christian guidance at home, children still choose the wrong path, at least parents would still know they did the best they could.

—Donald and Mansell and Vesta West Mansell, *Sure as the Dawn*, p. 273

13-THE CHURCH IN THE HOME

"Greet also the church that meets at their house" (Rom. 16:5).

The Apostles' words, "the church that meets at their house", have a new and dynamic meaning when we remember that every household should be a church.

In an oriental country, a young Japanese woman was invited to spend the holidays in a Christian lady's home. At the end of the vacation the lady asked her guest if she had enjoyed the way people live in the western world. "O, I loved it! Your house is very beautiful! But," she said with a faraway look in her eyes, "there is something I missed that made your home seem strange. I attended your church and watched you worship your God there; but, I missed seeing your God at your house. In my country we have a place for our gods in every house. Our gods are always with us. Do you worship your God in your home?"

Today many Christian homes are more secular and without God. People are caught up in trying to survive. Stress works in many homes to keep people from their devotional habits. Television programs and soap operas are watched with excitement. Entertainment competes with spending time with God. The household is no longer a church for the family. "I missed God at your house." The words of the Japanese woman showed that she did not feel God's presence in that Christian home.

As parents, it is our duty and privilege is to teach our children the way of life in Jesus. "They are to be carefully, wisely, tenderly guided into paths of Christlike ministry. We are under sacred covenant with God to rear our children for His service. To surround them with such influences as shall lead them to choose a life of service, and to give them the training needed, is our first duty" (*The Adventist Home*, p. 484).

Paul found one of his best co-workers in Timothy, who was from a home where God was honored. And he wrote: "I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also" (2 Tim. 1:5).

There are homes that create delinquents, criminals and useless people. There are others that make men and women who are of value to society. They are giants in faith like Timothy. Fathers and mothers are agents used by God to help grow their children's character. Is God in your home?

—Enoch de Oliveira, *Bom Dia Senhor*, p. 171

14-WHY DO MARRIAGES FAIL?

"Therefore what God has joined together, let no one separate" (Mark 10:9).

We feel sad and regretful when someone we know is separated from his or her partner. Our thoughts remember the couple's wedding day and vows. Memories recall flower bouquets, the wedding march, the wedding party and the bride's entrance. It is a moment of joy and delight. As couples stand at the marriage altar, the pastor gives them words of advice. Some of us would like to add our advice to the pastor's—we who have been married for 15, 20, 40 years. We could help them, for they are completely unfamiliar with the dramas and battles they will face in the future.

Homes usually disintegrate over a period of time, not all at once. It is often an accumulation of growing dissatisfaction, misunderstandings, and small irritations. Then suddenly, one decides that they cannot tolerate the other anymore. They have lost all respect for each other! What a tragedy! An even greater tragedy is when one partner has no clue that the marriage is falling apart. Someone said that marriage is like our health: you miss it only when you lose it. We often hear people say: "My marriage failed". It is not the wedding that fails, but spouses who fail after the wedding.

Divorce is a reality in countries around the world. Statistics keep climbing, but the one of the most overlooked heartaches comes to the children of divorce. They are the true victims. Lucia, my wife, is a teacher specializing in students who face dyslexia. She sees the drama up close of parents divorcing through the students she works with. Their grades are low, these children are not interested in studying, and they do not want to participate in school activities. They are angry, sad and traumatized.

Dr. Kenneth Johnson from Columbia University once said: "Imagine 300,000 children (today there are more than one million) attacked in a year by a fatal disease. Those children, the fruit of a divorce, will be emotionally disabled and traumatized. Compared to the impact of divorce, the chance of a physical disability is quite small."

Speaking of children of divorce, a Los Angeles Times article once stated, "Falling in love, becoming engaged and getting married all are serious decisions. Yet most young people enter marital life

with less care than someone choosing a partner to run a popcorn cart. Sexual passion, common to all animals, takes the place of love and affection.”

Someone mentioned four destructive wedges in the household: The wedge of time, when couples do not take time for family worship. The wedge of money, when it is not managed with true Christian stewardship. The wedge of a social life outside the home, when both partners spend more time with friends and criticize their partner in front of others. And the final wedge of household relationship: when both neglect to cultivate love through small attentions, failing to protect the beautiful plant of love, that should grow and reveal all the fragrance and delight of Christ who lives in that home.

“He gives grace for grace. There can be no failure of supply” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 148).

– Léo Ranzolin, *Jesus, the Morning Dew*, p. 178

15–FAMILY WORSHIP NOT TO BE NEGLECTED

“Trust...in the living God, who giveth us richly all things to enjoy” (1 Tim. 6:17, KJV).

We should be much happier and more useful, if our homelife and social intercourse were governed by the principles of the Christian religion, and illustrated the meekness and simplicity of Christ... Let visitors see that we try to make all around us happy by our cheerfulness, sympathy, and love.

While we endeavor to secure the comfort and happiness of our guests, let us not overlook our obligation to God. The hour of prayer should not be neglected for any consideration. ... At an early hour of the evening, when you can pray unhurriedly and understandingly, present your supplication, and raise your voices in happy, grateful praise. Let all who visit Christians see that the hour of prayer is the most sacred, the most precious, and the happiest hour of the day. Such an example will not be without effect.

These seasons of devotion exert a refining, elevating influence upon all who participate in them. Right thoughts and new and better desires will be awakened in the hearts of the most careless. The hour of prayer brings a peace and rest grateful to the weary spirit; for the very atmosphere of a Christian home is that of peace and restfulness.

In every act the Christian should seek to represent his Master, to make His service appear attractive. ...

Nine tenths of the trials and perplexities that so many worry over are either imaginary, or brought upon themselves by their own wrong course. They should cease to talk of these trials, and [cease] to magnify them. The Christian may commit every worriment, every disturbing thing to God. Nothing is too small for our compassionate Saviour to notice; nothing is too great for Him to carry.

Then let us set our hearts and homes in order; let us teach our children that the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; and let us, by a cheerful, happy, well-ordered life, express our gratitude and love to Him “who giveth us richly all things to enjoy” (1 Tim. 6:17). But above all things, let us fix our thoughts and the affections of our hearts on the dear Saviour who suffered for guilty man, and thus opened heaven for us.

Love to Jesus cannot be hidden, but will make itself seen and felt. It exerts a wondrous power. It makes the timid bold, the slothful diligent, the ignorant wise. It makes the stammering tongue eloquent, and rouses the dormant intellect into new life and vigor. It makes the desponding hopeful, the gloomy joyous. Love to Christ will lead its possessor to accept responsibilities and cares for His sake, and to bear them in His strength. Love to Christ will lead its possessor to accept responsibilities and cares for His sake, and to bear them in His strength.

–Ellen G. White, *Our Father Cares*, p. 297

16–LOVE DOES NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT A WRONG SUFFERED

“Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud” (1 Cor. 13:4).

Today we will talk about jealousy. What is jealousy? It is a painful feeling that hurts the heart of those who feel it, taking them beyond their emotions’ control. In general, jealousy is expressed through a desire to possess another person whom they think they love. It is followed by the fear of losing this person. Even though, at first glance, jealousy might seem like a beautiful and romantic feeling, it is actually a sick way of thinking. It is highly destructive and prevents the growth of true love and peace.

C. Diane once said: “Jealousy is the worm of hatred in love; sometimes it kills, but always it hurts.” This is a good definition. Jealousy lives in a house germinated by hate. The distance separating jealousy and hate is invisible. In general, those who allow jealousy to dominate their lives lose the control of their emotions. They are easily led to extreme behaviors. When they realize what they have done, it could be too late.

With very appropriate words, the Apostle Paul wrote that true love “does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered” (1 Cor. 13:5, NASB).

What a deep difference between true love and the kind of love revealed by one who is surrounded by the sharp claws of jealousy. Jealousy is selfish and possessive. True love is unselfish. So, the jealous only seek their own interests. The one who truly loves looks for the sake of others and, in a very special way, for the interests of their beloved. True love is not provoked by anything and does not take into account a wrong suffered.

We could avoid many evils by not allowing the sparks of jealousy to enter our hearts. For even the smallest spark could ignite great fires. Better to be safe than sorry. We need a lot of divine help so that true love might be crowned within the heart.

–*Daily Meditations*, p. 23

17–HOUSEHOLD HARMONY

“Now Israel loved Joseph more than all his children, because he was the son of his old age. Also he made him a tunic of many colors” (Gen. 37:3, NKJV).

As it happens in many families, Jacob’s family had problems. Joseph



was a cherished son. One day, his father gave him a multi-colored tunic as gift. His brothers' jealousy had been growing for some time and this was the last straw.

When they were pasturing their father's flock in a field, they plotted what they could do to end their father's preference for Joseph. When Joseph came to check on his brothers, bringing food his father sent, they put their plan into practice. Even though all the brothers were not in agreement, Joseph was still sold as a slave and went to Egypt when only 17-years-old.

It is not easy for parents to treat their children equally. Every son or daughter has his or her own individual characteristics. They are different in age, likes, health and behavior. And this can lead parents to make different choices for each of their children. How we approach one child may not work as well for another child.

It is at this point that parents should use good sense. There is nothing better than divine guidance and open discussion to promote comprehension between children and parents. Careful talking can help a child understand that a younger sibling who is sick may need more gentleness, affection and care. Even so, parents should avoid showing special preferences for one child. This can cause serious injuries to the children's character formation, for when they face life's problems, a child can continue to be needy and dependent. Their jealous sibling will tend to grow up constantly rebelling against everything and everybody.

When parents show balanced and reasonable love to their children, they promote a pleasant environment of peace and harmony. Then the home becomes a place where the God's angels are happy to be present.

—*Daily Meditations*, p. 126

18-HOUSEHOLD DIALOG

"Put away from you a deceitful mouth, and put perverse lips far from you" (Prov. 4:24, NKJV).

Years ago, I read an interesting article in a newspaper from Porto Velho, Brazil, called "Marital Happiness" by Cilio Bocannera. He mentions a work presented by a Professor Howard Markman from Denver University during a conference for specialists in marital therapy in London. He stated that "the way a couple argues defines how successful the marriage will be." That is, "the tactics the husband and wife use in their arguing is a good clue to the likelihood of divorce."

It is interesting that Professor Markman studied a thousand couples that frequently argued. He then concluded that the most endangered couples were those who run away from the argument and those who allow minor subjects become great disputes. We know this is very common. There are couples who disagree about where to put soap in the bathroom or how to squeeze the toothpaste tube. They allow small disagreements to affect other more important points in life. Finally, the relationship ends in separation and divorce. Sometimes even more fatal mistakes are made.

Professor Markman mentions something that requires serious and deep reflection. He says, "An insult or offense toward another erases five, ten or sometimes more than twenty acts of kindness in a relationship."

If couples are thinking about separation, they should stop and think about the wounded hearts they will cause in their children, the absence of father or mother from their children, the lack of

support, advice and companionship caused by divorce. Couples should think carefully about how their choices will impact others.

As rational and intelligent beings, we should spend less time arguing about small things and focus more on listening. Seek to understand your spouse's point of view. Even if you disagree with their perspective, try to keep happiness and peace in your home. Be willing to give up your position. Learn to be tolerant. Try to reach a point of agreement.

There is no substitute for the positive effect of kind words and acts of loves inspired by God's love on the hearts of those within our homes.

–*Daily Meditations*, p. 152

19–LOST CHILDREN OR LOST PARENTS?

"Then they brought little children to Him, that He might touch them; but the disciples rebuked those who brought them. But when Jesus saw it, He was greatly displeased and said to them, 'Let the little children come to Me, and do not forbid them; for of such is the kingdom of God'" (Mark 10:13, 14, NKJV).

In a big supermarket a PA system once made this interesting announcement: "We have at the front desk a little boy who says that his father is lost and cannot find him."

There is another story of a couple who noticed one morning that their little boy was missing from home. The parents were frantic as they searched for him. They informed their neighbors and friends and the police to help search for the children. Every home in the neighborhood was searched. Fields and woods were searched. They could not find one trace of the little boy.

On this particular morning, a morning in which the family typically left home together and attended a meeting, someone suggested they search at this meeting place. Sure enough, there sat the boy quietly holding a small toy in his hands that he brought from home. The parents hugged him and felt greatly relieved. The mother, wiping tears from her eyes, exclaimed, "My precious little son, you were lost and now you are found!"

The little boy looked at his mother and replied, "Mother, I was not lost. I was at church."

These two stories speak more about lost parents than about lost children. Every child, in their innocence and purity, has the natural desire to be with God. Many times the parents and adults cut off the child's spiritual development when they do not permit them develop their desire to follow Jesus.

Perhaps that was why Jesus was unhappy His disciples stopped the children: "When Jesus saw this, he was indignant. He said to them, Let the little children come to me, and do not hinder them, for the kingdom of God belongs to such as these" (Mark 10:14). Let us think seriously about this warning!

–*Daily Meditations*, p. 165

20-WHAT DID THEY SEE IN YOUR HOME?

"And he [the prophet] said, 'What have they seen in your house?' So Hezekiah answered, 'They have seen all that is in my house; there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shown them'" (Isa. 39:4, NKJV).

King Hezekiah was sick with a serious disease, but the Lord heard his prayer and restored his health. When Isaiah told the king that he would be the object of divine grace, he also gave Hezekiah a sign. He said the shadow cast by the sun on the stairway of the palace would go back ten steps. This amazing phenomenon was observed in faraway Mesopotamia. Marduk-Baladan, king of Babylon, sent an embassy to greet Hezekiah upon his recovery. We know Marduk-Baladan had other intentions. He wanted Hezekiah as an ally to fight against Assyria.

Honored for the visit of the messengers, Hezekiah did not hesitate to show them all his treasures and his armory. Unaware that he was being proved, Hezekiah absolutely failed. The chronicler said: "God withdrew from him, in order to test him that He might know all that was in his heart" (2 Chron. 32:31, NKJV). By this time the prophet came to the king and asked the question in our opening text: "What did they see in your house?"

That same question is asked of us by angels after we have visitors in our own homes. They too ask, "What did they see in your house?" What people see in our homes can be divided into three groups: First, in some homes people mostly see material possessions. They see rich furniture, fancy curtains, and impressive silverware. Such houses are like museums, but little more. Second, there are some homes where visitors mostly notice the people who live in the house. Perhaps they notice a gentle householder; a talented or conceited housewife; children that sometimes dominate the room like little tyrants. And finally, there are homes where visitors are most impressed, not by the things or people, but the atmosphere of the house. Maybe it is filled with peace and devotion. Visitors leave such homes encouraged in their faith in God. They sensed in these homes the presence of angels.

On one occasion Greeks who were visiting Jerusalem went to one of the disciples with an urgent request: "Sir," they said, "we would like to see Jesus" (John 12:21). Could it be that many people who visit our homes would like to "see Jesus?" Should we disappoint them?

Hezekiah lost a magnificent opportunity to testify about God and the great blessing He gave to Hezekiah. Would we make the same mistake? Let us ask ourselves the question, "What did they see in your house?"

—Siegfried J. Schwantes, *Closer to God*, p. 118

21-TIME FOR CHILDREN

"Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged" (Col. 3:21).

I believe there is nothing more annoying to a child than being the orphan of a living father. Yes, do not be surprised by this comment! Listen to this story:



After a very busy day in the office, a father was relaxing. He was comfortably sitting on the living room couch reading the newspaper. In that moment his preteen son enters the room. He touches his father's shoulders and says: "Dad, dad!"

His father, who could not take his eyes off the newspaper, said: "What do you want son, how much do you want?" The boy replies: "Dad, I do not want money, I want you!"

Similar stories could be shared time and again, but all would have one thing in common. There are countless homes where the father, mother or both are so busy searching for financial or professional success that they do not dedicate time for their children. Many parents believe that financial success would solve their problems.

"Dad, I do not want money, I want you!" That is what many children cry for. We have to understand that there is no time better spent by a father or a mother than that which is dedicated to their children. To answer this cry, it takes planning and willpower from the parents to prioritize the attention their children deserve.

I say *planning* because parents should put in their daily schedule some time dedicated to their children. This should be something as sacred and important as a job commitment. It is not just the quantity of time you spend either. You must genuinely interact with your children in a quality way as well.

It also takes perseverance to make time for children a priority. And remember, it is never too late to dedicate time, love and kindness to your children. At the right time they will return to us everything we have invested in them. They will acknowledge that we gave them something money could not afford - love.

—*Daily Meditations*, p. 346

22—A SONG OF LOVE

"Many waters cannot quench love, nor can the floods drown it. If a man would give for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly despised" (Song of Songs 8:7, NKJV).

As I write it will soon be 40 years that Vesta and I have been married. Our union has been exceptionally happy and heaven blessed. We are the first to admit that it is the Lord's doing, not ours.

After our heavenly Father, my earthly father deserves a large credit for our happiness. He did not have the advantage of being born into a happy home. His father and mother were divorced when he was a babe in her arms. But one day Dad gave his heart to God—totally. He resolved to serve God... nothing more, nothing less, and nothing else! Consequently God could guide him to my mother. She already had completely dedicated her life to God. So the Lord could guide her to dad.

Not even once through the years did I see them arguing. When I became adult I asked Dad, "Have you ever argued with Mother?" His answer surprised me.

"Yes, we have. But we have never argued in front of you children. There was not a problem big enough that we could not solve humbly on our knees before the cross."

While we were children growing up in the home, my parents openly demonstrated their affection for each other. Even in their old age, when we brought them to our home, their love affair continued.

Even the grandchildren witnessed this affection. Vesta and I have tried to follow their example since our wedding day. After all, life is uncertain. If something happens to us, we want our last memory from the other to be a happy one.

We are aware of the fact that in a sinful world things could change overnight. So if that is what life is, we “put no confidence in the flesh” (Phil. 3:3). We know this: “Unless the LORD builds the house, the builders labor in vain. Unless the LORD watches over the city, the guards stand watch in vain” (Psalm 127:1). We know that we are only safe if we completely give our lives to God every moment - and this is what we have decided to do. May this decision be yours as well.

—Donald Mansell and Vesta West Mansell, *Sure as the Dawn*, p. 51

23—HOME - A PLACE OF LOVE

“So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed only a few days to him because of the love he had for her” (Gen. 29:20, NKJV).

Have you noticed that when two or three airplanes accidents happen in a row, or there is some violent abduction, a wave of requests for more safety is generated by the press? Politicians get excited and the government tries to improve security rules. When you look at all the broken homes in our world, all the unhappy children, and all the wounded hearts with irreparable sorrows, do you not think we need better “safety rules” for our homes and churches?

A man once visited a counselor to discuss the best things he could do for his children. He hoped to receive advice about education—which school they should attend, what cultural advantages he should provide them. However, the counselor’s response surprised him. He said, “The best thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother. The child who lives in a home where the father truly loves his wife is a blessed child, much more than the one whose father is willing to write big checks.”

The path that leads from a happy marriage before a pastor or judge to the divorce court is one of the most tragic roads a human being could travel.

“The family tie is the closest, the most tender and sacred, of any on earth. It was designed to be a blessing to mankind. And it is a blessing wherever the marriage covenant is entered into intelligently, in the fear of God, and with due consideration for its responsibilities” (Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 356, 357).

Let us make our household a place of love and peace. Let us share love instead of simply demand love from others. Then we would feel how good it is to be in a place of happiness.

—*Daily Meditations*, p. 346

24—THE HOME OF GOD

“I dwell in the high and holy place, with him who has a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones” (Isa. 57:15, NKJV).

In 1791 a boy named John Howard Payne was born in New York City. He became a famous actor, not only in United States, but also in England and France. From 1842 to 1845 and again in 1851 and 1852, he was an American consul in Tunisia, in Northern Africa. He died while serving there and was buried in the same place. But thirty years later, in 1882, his body was taken back to America and buried among famous people in Dumbarton Oaks cemetery in the country’s capital.

On his burial day, there in Washington, D.C., the Congress and Supreme Court interrupted their activities to honor the event. Even the president, vice-president and cabinet members followed the funeral down Pennsylvania Avenue. Can you imagine the reason he received such great honor? Was it because he was famous? Oh, no! Was it because he was an honorable consul? Oh, no! You would not guess. It was because he was the author of that loved and beautiful song: "Home, Sweet Home!" The song was sung by a thousand-voice choir next to his grave.

Here are some of the lyrics: "Mid pleasures and palaces though we may roam, be it ever so humble, there's no place like home. A charm from the sky seems to hallow us there, which, seek through the world, is ne'er met with elsewhere."

Every language on earth has a word for term "house", but only Christian nations' languages have a word for the term "home". Home is a house where people love God and one another. Solomon had in his heart a desire to "build a house for the name of the Lord." No doubt God was happy in blessing that house with His presence. But Isaiah tells us that God will live "also with the one who is contrite and lowly in spirit." What a sublime thought! We can make of our heart a beautiful home, where God will be pleased to live! Is your heart contrite (repentant)? Do you recognize your mistakes and confess your sins? Are you humble? If so, you will know God's joy.

—Eric B. Hare, *Make God First*, p. 182

25—THE INFLUENCE OF A CHRISTIAN HOME

"He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12, KJV).

Our time, our strength, and our energies belong to God; and if they are consecrated to His service, our light will shine. It will affect first and most strongly those in our own homes, who are most intimately associated with us; but it will extend beyond the home, even to "the world." To many it will be a savor of life unto life; but there are some who will refuse to see the light, or to walk in it. They are of that class spoken of by our Saviour, when He said: "And this is the condemnation, that light is come into the world, and men loved darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil" (John 3:19, KJV). Such are in a very dangerous position; but their course does not excuse any of us from letting our light shine.

Suppose that because some ship had disregarded his warning beacon, and gone to pieces on the rocks, the lighthouse keeper should put out his lights, and say, "I will pay no more attention to the lighthouse"; what would be the consequence? But that is not the way he does. He keeps his lights burning all night, throwing their beams far out into the darkness, for the benefit of every mariner that comes within the dangerous reach of rocks and shoals. Were some ship to be wrecked because the lights went out, it would be telegraphed over the world that on such a night, at such a point, a ship went to pieces on the rocks because there was no light in the tower. But if some ships are wrecked because they pay no attention to the light, the lighthouse keeper is guiltless; they were warned, but they paid no heed.

What if the light in the household should go out? Then everyone in that house would be in darkness; and the result would be as disastrous as though the light were to go out in the lighthouse tower. Souls are looking at you, fellow Christians, to see whether you are drunken with the cares of this life, or are preparing for the future, immortal life. They will watch to see what the influence of your life is, and whether you are true missionaries at home, training your children for heaven.

The Christian's first duty is in the home. Fathers and mothers, yours is a great responsibility. You

are preparing your children for life or for death; you are training them for an abiding place here in the earth, for self-gratification in this life, or for the immortal life, to praise God forever. And which shall it be? It should be the burden of your life to have every child that God has committed to your trust receive the divine mold (*Signs of the Times*, Nov.14, 1886).

–Ellen G. White, *Reflecting Christ*, p. 167

26–THE BIBLE IS THE VOICE OF GOD TO FAMILIES

“Children are a heritage from the Lord” (Psalm 127:3).

Parents need to reform; ministers need to reform; they need God in their households. If they would see a different state of things, they must bring His Word into their families and must make it their counselor. They must teach their children that it is the voice of God addressed to them, and is to be implicitly obeyed. They should patiently instruct their children, kindly and untiringly teach them how to live in order to please God. The children of such a household are prepared to meet the sophistries of infidelity. They have accepted the Bible as the basis of their faith, and they have a foundation that cannot be swept away by the incoming tide of skepticism.

In too many households prayer is neglected. Parents feel that they have no time for morning and evening worship. They cannot spare a few moments to be spent in thanksgiving to God for His abundant mercies—for the blessed sunshine and the showers of rain, which cause vegetation to flourish, and for the guardianship of holy angels. They have no time to offer prayer for divine help and guidance and for the abiding presence of Jesus in the household. They go forth to labor... without one thought of God or heaven. They have souls so precious that rather than permit them to be hopelessly lost, the Son of God gave His life to ransom them...

Like the patriarchs of old, those who profess to love God should erect an altar to the Lord wherever they pitch their tent. If ever there was a time when every house should be a house of prayer, it is now. Fathers and mothers should often lift up their hearts to God in humble supplication for themselves and their children. Let the father, as priest of the household, lay upon the altar of God the morning and evening sacrifice, while the wife and children unite in prayer and praise. In such a household Jesus will love to tarry.

From every Christian home a holy light should shine forth. Love should be revealed in action. It should flow out in all home intercourse, showing itself in thoughtful kindness, in gentle, unselfish courtesy. There are homes where this principle is carried out—homes where God is worshiped and truest love reigns. From these homes morning and evening prayer ascends to God as sweet incense, and His mercies and blessings descend upon the suppliants like the morning dew. – *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 143, 144.

That which will make the character lovely in the home is that which will make it lovely in the heavenly mansions. – *Child Guidance*. p. 481.

–Ellen G. White, *Reflecting Christ*, p. 182

27–LAYING HOLD OF THE MIGHTY ONE OF HEAVEN

“Let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us: and establish thou the work of our hands upon us; yea, the work of our hands establish thou it” (Psalm 90:17, NKJV).

Your children should be taught to control their tempers and to cultivate a loving, Christlike spirit.

So direct them that they will love the service of God, that they will take more pleasure in going to the house of worship than to places of amusement. Teach them that religion is a living principle. Had I been brought up with the idea that religion is a mere feeling, my life would have been a useless one. But I never let feeling come between Heaven and my soul. Whatever my feelings may be, I will seek God at the commencement of the day, at noon, and at night, that I may draw strength from the living Source of power.

[Mothers,] has ... not [your time] been given you to be spent in beautifying the minds of your children, and cultivating loveliness of character? Should it not be spent in laying hold of the Mighty One of heaven, and seeking Him for power and wisdom to train your children for a place in His kingdom, to secure for them a life that will endure as long as the throne of Jehovah? ...

Perhaps the mother sits at her work night after night, while her children go to bed without a prayer or a good-night kiss. She does not bind their tender hearts to her own by the cords of love; for she is "too busy."...

Some may wonder why it is that we say so much about home religion and the children. It is because of the terrible neglect of home duties on the part of so many. As the servants of God, parents, you are responsible for the children committed to your care. Many of them are growing up without reverence, growing up careless and irreligious, unthankful and unholy.

If these children had been properly trained and disciplined, if they had been brought up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord, heavenly angels would be in your homes. If you were true home missionaries, ... you would be ... fitting your children to stand by your side, as efficient workers in the cause of God.

What an impression it makes upon society to see a family united in the work and service of the Lord. Such a family is a powerful discourse in favor of the reality of Christianity. Others see that there is an influence at work in the family that affects the children, and that the God of Abraham is with them. And that which has such a powerful influence on the children is felt beyond the home, and affects other lives. If the homes of professed Christians had a right religious mold, they would exert a mighty influence for good. They would indeed be the "light of the world." - *Signs of the Times*, Jan. 14, 1886.

-Ellen G. White, *Reflecting Christ*, p. 169

28-AN ARGUMENT INFIDELS CANNOT RESIST

"While ye have light, believe in the light, that ye may be the children of light" (John 12:36).

A well-ordered Christian household is an argument that the infidel cannot resist. He finds no place for his cavils [trivial fault-finding]. And the children of such a household are prepared to meet the sophistries of infidelity. They have accepted the Bible as the basis of their faith, and they have a firm foundation that cannot be swept away by the incoming tide of skepticism.



Said Christ, "Ye are the light of the world" (Matt. 5:14). He has committed talents to our keeping. What are we doing with His entrusted gifts? What are we doing with His entrusted gifts? Are we letting our light shine by using them for His glory and the benefit of our fellow men, or are we using them to advance our own selfish interests? Many are using them selfishly. They do not seem to realize that we are all judgment-bound, and must soon give an account for the use we have made of our God-given opportunities to do good. But what excuse will they give in that great day for not using in the cause of God their skill, their education, their tact, and their perseverance and zeal?

We need divine help if we would keep our lights burning. But Jesus died to provide that aid. He extends the invitation: "Let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace with me" (Isa 27:5). Cling to the arm of Infinite Power; then you will find Him precious to your soul, and all heaven will be at your command. "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light" (1 John 1:7), we shall have the companionship of holy angels. To "Joshua" it was said, "Thus saith the Lord of hosts: If thou wilt walk in my ways, and if thou wilt keep my charge, ... I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by" (Zech. 3:7). And who are "these that stand by"? They are the angels of God. Joshua must have a living, confiding trust in God every day; and then angels would walk with him, and the power of God would rest upon him in all his labors.

Then, Christian friends, fathers and mothers, let your light grow dim—no, never! Let your heart grow faint, or your hands weary—no, never! And by and by the portals of the celestial city will be opened to you; and you may present yourselves and your children before the throne, saying, "Here am I, and the children whom Thou hast given me" (Isa. 8:18). And what a reward for faithfulness that will be, to see your children crowned with immortal life in the beautiful city of God! - *Signs of the Times*, Jan. 14, 1886.

—Ellen G. White, *Our Father Cares*, p. 296

29—HOW TO UNITE HEARTS

"He will turn the hearts of the parents to their children, and the hearts of the children to their parents" (Malachi 4:6).

The principle of love was established by God before sin, so that Adam, Eve and their offspring could live in happiness. We have seen how Satan has mixed the meaning of love with passion, free sex and fleshly desires. So, it was necessary for God to create a difference between true love and human love. God established love as an eternal behavior principle and not a feeling, or a physical sensation, much less a casual experience. Pure love, in any circumstance, is that vital element that brings peace to the heart and guides the mind to rightly decide how to solve problems.

In a culture where people's minds are mostly focused on what is evil, we need something in our personal experience to help us keep alive in our minds this principle of true love. This "something" is conversion or justification by faith in Christ. This was the second principle that the Lord granted in Eden, so that Adam and Eve could still love each other, even after sin entered. Genesis 3:15 and 21 tell us a lamb was sacrificed for our first parents. Blood was shed to teach the world that true love can only come by faith in the Lamb of God! In other words, we receive such love by daily walking with Christ.

A son once had a serious argument with his father. The mother watched the heated discussion

but remained silent. When the son left the house, she said to her husband: "Ernest, you were not right. Why are you so demanding of the boy?"

The husband replied, "Do you think I should humble myself before that difficult young man? He would always think he was right!"

To which the wife responded, "You are mistaken! Aren't we Christians? Listen Ernest, we should teach our children that we live by God's forgiveness. Family unity does not depend on your authority, but from our Savior's grace and faithfulness." The husband had no response.

Later, when his son came back home, the father called him and said: "My son, you were right. I am sorry for not seeing this sooner. Please, forgive me!"

"My father," replied the son with a lump in his throat. Then he turned away before his father could see his tears of thankfulness. - *Power and Light*, 06/12/60.

-Moysés S. Nigri, *Walking with God Every Day*, p. 339

30-PRINCIPLES OF A HAPPY HOME

"And Jesus and his disciples had also been invited to the wedding" (John 2:2).

Can you imagine the privilege of that couple to have Jesus and His disciples invited to their wedding? Did they understand the meaning of the Master's presence? It is interesting that, like many weddings, a problem came up. It wasn't a difficult one. They simply ran out of wine (grape juice). In my country of Brazil, that would be like running out of punch before the party was over.

A few years ago I almost postponed a wedding service where I was asked to preach. The bride and groom had a misunderstanding that really worried us all. But today they are a happily married couple. Why? They invited Jesus to their wedding. They asked Christ to be part of their household. And the Lord has supplied all their needs.

Jesus' presence is the most important part of a successful wedding. Without Christ it is impossible to enjoy complete happiness. Christ will be the One who will lead the household and provide the necessary guidelines for parents and children on how to live on earth in preparation for a home in heaven.

However, there are other simple and practical factors that may positively influence a couples' relationship. I call them "Special Moments." The first is our *Moment with God*. Do we take time every day for personal worship? Do we fast and pray? Do we read our Bibles? Each of us needs quiet time alone with God.

The second is our *Moment for Planning*. We live in a busy world, where father and mother have to work. Most of the time the wife is not at home full-time anymore, but she is side by side with her partner, providing bread for the family. Both of them have battles and difficulties at work and then come home exhausted! Children return from school, they have homework to do, books to read... Who will take the responsibilities of the house? Would it be the wife alone? The husband expects dinner but usually doesn't offer to help. Families need a plan on how to work together or there will be conflict and stress in the home.

The third is our *Family Moments*. While family worship is very important, there also needs to be time for talking and sharing. Each family member needs to hear about the little victories or

disappointments in each other's day. Such companionship builds intimacy in the family and is essential. Marriage is often called a journey, but we are all seeking a destination—heaven! We arrive there by growing each day in Christ. Families need to learn to deal with conflict. They need to learn to say, "I'm sorry. Please forgive me. I was wrong."

Mrs. White gives us advice on people thinking about getting married: "If men and women are in the habit of praying twice a day before they contemplate marriage, they should pray four times a day when such a step is anticipated. Marriage is something that will influence and affect your life, both in this world and in the world to come". - *Messages to Young People*, p. 460.

- Léo Ranzolin, *Jesus, the Morning Dew*, p. 179

31-LOVING: WHEN AND HOW?

"So Jacob served seven years to get Rachel, but they seemed like only a few days to him because of his love for her" (Gen. 29:20).

"Tis love that makes us happy, 'Tis love that smoothes the way; It helps us mind, it makes us kind to others every day" - F. E. Belden.

The first love we meet in life is our dad and mom's love. Next, we experience love from our siblings and friends. Then we see love in the adolescence years when a boy is attracted to a girl and a girl to a boy. As young adults people begin to think seriously about planning a future home. A young man becomes interested in and chooses a special young lady. If they are attending college, marriage often comes after graduation. All of these different types of love influence the love that follows.

Parents naturally enjoy hugging and kissing their children. Some siblings will hug each other, but we usually don't hug and kiss our friends. Husbands and wives should express their love in a warm embrace or a soft kiss. But expressions of love between young couples should not exceed certain limits before marriage.

Each of us likes to have our own things. When under control, it is good to work, save money, and make purchases. But when our desire for material things gets out of control, it makes people miserable and turns many into thieves.

That is the same way with love. It is a good thing to be desired and controlled. Healthy love is beautiful, kind, and pure. But when love is uncontrolled, when passion takes over, we fall into sin and disappointment. Our relationships become dead and dry when we are grasping after love instead of expressing genuine love. Our sad days will feel like long years.

So carefully play the game of pure love. Follow the rules and someday you will be prepared for a love that will make you happy and make years seem like a few brief days.

-Eric B. Hare, *Make God First*, p. 22



Appendix E

Guidelines for Day of Fasting and Prayer

1. Choose a Sabbath near the end of month 2 for a day of fasting and prayer.
2. Explain different types of fasting to members. Everyone needs to drink water, but some people may fast from food but still drink fruit juice. Others may choose to fast from all foods except fresh fruit. Another way to fast is to refrain from all media (television, radio, computer, Internet, magazines, books) except spiritual literature and the Bible.
3. One idea is to open the church early for an hour of prayer before services begin. Sabbath afternoon could be another time to come together for prayer. Try something like this:
 - a. Prayers of Praise to God
 - i. Read 2-3 Bible verses on praise to God (Psalm 29:1, 2; Psalm 42:1, 2; Psalm 57:9-11).
 - ii. Pray as a group, giving praises to God. Keep your prayers very short, which allows others to participate. People may pray more than once.
 - b. Prayers of Repentance
 - i. Read 2-3 Bible verses on repentance (Psalm 51; Psalm 32:1-5; 1 John 1:9).
 - ii. Invite people to pray by themselves, asking God to search their hearts and forgive them of all sin in their lives.
 - c. Prayers of Intercession for the Church
 - i. Read 2-3 Bible verses on the power of intercessory prayer (Matt. 7:7-11; Mark 11:22-24; 1 John 5:14, 15).
 - ii. Invite people to pray in groups of two or three, praying for each other and for the church to be a witness in your community.
 - d. Prayers of Intercession for the Community
 - i. Read 2-3 Bible verses on the importance of being a witness to the world (Matt. 5:13-16; 1 Peter 2:9, 10; Matt. 28:18-20).
 - ii. Invite people to pray in groups of two or three, lifting up families in the community. Encourage them to say the names of these families and plead with God on their behalf.
 - e. Conclude with a Time of Thanks to God
 - i. Read 2-3 Bible verses on God hearing our prayers (2 Chron. 7:14; Heb. 5:7; Psalm 6:8, 9).
 - ii. Invite people to stand in a circle and pray as a group, using short phrases and prayers, allowing everyone to pray.
 - iii. Finish by singing a hymn or praise song.

Appendix F

Mini Seminar on How to Make Friends for Christ

Introduction

The following outline is for giving a short seminar* (roughly two hours) to help church families witness to their neighbors and friends. It is intended to be taught in one session for all family members of all ages. It could also be broken into two teaching segments. The material is based on Ellen White's statement in *Ministry of Healing*, which has five different steps for bringing people to Jesus. Some people call this important work "Friendship Evangelism." Each teaching part below will be approached in three ways. First, the presenter asks the class, "Why is this step important?" Then, "What does this step mean?" And finally, "How do we practice this step?"

Step 1 – Mingling with People

WHY?

Opening Exercise: Invite church members to break into small groups of four or five. Ask them to answer the following question:

When it comes to witnessing for Christ, have you ever experienced any of the following?

- **Fear.** "I'm afraid people will reject me or get angry with me when I try to witness."
- **Confusion.** "I'm not sure what to say. My words will probably get all mixed up."
- **Hesitation.** "I'm not really trained to witness. Other people could do a better job than me."
- **Shyness.** "I'm not really good about talking with strangers about religious topics."
- **Other:** _____

Invite the group to discuss their responses for a few minutes. Then invite some people to share with the rest of the group.

WHAT?

When it comes to witnessing, people experience many different emotions. This seminar is about Friendship Evangelism, which is not a structured program for witnessing. It is a process that grows with people you get to know in everyday life. It is based on a statement from Ellen White: "Christ's method alone will bring true success in reaching people. The Savior mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me'" (*Ministry of Healing*, p. 143).

Notice that there are five actions in her statement:

1. The Savior *mingled with men* as one who desired their good



2. He *showed His sympathy* for them

3. *Ministered to their needs* and

4. *Won their confidence.*

5. Then He *bade them, 'Follow Me.'*

Her statement says that this method will bring “true success.” There are many different parts to leading someone to make a commitment to Christ and baptism. This seminar does not focus on giving Bible studies or holding evangelistic meetings. These steps happen even before we begin studying the Bible with people.

Where do you mingle with other people? Let’s make a list of places. Share your ideas. [Invite people to speak up.] Examples: walking down the street where you live and running into neighbors, at community events, at the grocery store, while buying gasoline for your car, at the park, at a reunion with relatives, etc.

Who do you mingle with? Let’s make a list. Share your ideas. [Invite people to speak up.] Examples: your circle of friends, relatives, neighbors, co-workers, people you employ (dentist, doctor, barber, garbage collectors, etc.).

HOW?

In making our lists we can see that there are more people we mingle with than we might have thought. But the question still remains: *How* do you mingle with people? Here are some thoughts to guide us:

- Jesus wants us to be *in* the world, but not *of* the world (John 17:15).
- Jesus cares about the *immediate needs* of people, not just spiritual needs (Luke 4:18, 19).
- Jesus mingled with *care*. Christ was concerned about people and was kind to them.
- We are to be like Jesus, mingling with care to those around us every day.
- God brings people across our pathways in the way we live our lives and where we go. These are the people we can mingle with for the sake of Jesus.

Mingling with people is not so much about doing door to door witnessing. There is nothing wrong with doing this, but mingling is something that happens in the context of what we do every day. We can mingle with people by stopping and talking with our neighbors while walking. We can mingle with mothers and their children while at the park. We can mingle with people while we are getting a haircut or picking up dry-cleaning. Christ took the time to show interest in the people around Him and so should we.

Step 2 – Showing Compassion

WHY?

Opening Exercise: Invite church members to break into small groups of four or five. Ask them to answer the following question: “Share about a time you were discouraged and someone helped you. What did they do that helped most?”

[Ask people to share for a few minutes in their small groups. Then invite a few people to share with the rest of the group.]

WHAT?

The second step in Christ’s method of winning people to God was to show *sympathy*. Another word we use today is *compassion*. Jesus genuinely cared about people that were hurting. When we read about what true Adventists are like—people who are waiting for the second coming of Christ—we learn in Matthew 25 that they see Jesus in the people who are around them—people who are in prison, people who are hungry and thirsty, people who need clothing.

Notice in verse 44 that some people at the judgment say to Jesus, “We didn’t see You hungry or thirsty or needing clothes.” Christ says to these people, “I never knew you.” In others, when people are genuinely Christians, they have a heart that cares about others around them, just like Jesus. They do not mechanically do things for others; it comes from having compassion for others.

One of the simplest ways to show compassion is to listen to people. Christians are often accused of talking a lot but not doing much. Yet when someone says, “There’s a *real* Christian,” what they mean is, “That person doesn’t just talk – they *act* like a Christian.” And this can happen through simply listening to the heart of a hurting person. Sometimes we show more love when we are quiet while with someone who is going through a difficult time.

If you are going to win people to Jesus, they must trust you. Showing compassion is one of the most important parts of building trust. Do you trust people who are mean? Do you trust people who hurt others? Do you trust people who only seem concerned with their own well-being? Of course not. We trust people who are kind and caring.

HOW?

Listening is very simple, though it is also very difficult. Listening is something you can do just about any time or any place. You do not need special equipment to listen (except your ears). Listening is an unselfish act that can bring healing to others, but it takes self-discipline. Here are some tips on how to be a better listener:

- **Paraphrasing.** This happens when you share with the other person what you are hearing them say. It helps them to know you understand them.
- **Active Listening.** This happens when you ask for more information or you ask a clarifying question to make certain you understand what the person is trying to tell you.
- **Clarification of Feelings.** If you sense people are hurting, it can be helpful to verify what you think they might be feeling. “I sense that you are feeling [lonely, angry, discouraged] right now. Is that correct?”

There are lots of ideal times to listen to people. Some happen around big events in their life, like when someone has a baby or if someone is sick. One of the most important times to listen is when someone suffers a loss. That can be a loss of a friendship, of a job, or of someone who dies. When we tune into the hearts of others through listening, we are showing the compassion of Christ toward them.

Step 3 – Ministering to Needs

WHY?

Opening Exercise: Invite church members to break into small groups of four or five. Ask them to answer the following question: “Share a time you needed some practical help and someone came to your aid. What happened? How did you feel?”

[Ask people to share for a few minutes in their small groups. Then invite a few people to share with the rest of the group.]

WHAT?

The third step in Christ’s method of winning people to God was to minister to the practical needs of others. Jesus would help people in whatever way they currently needed help. That might mean providing them with food or bringing healing to their body. Not everyone has the same type of needs. Let’s think about the different types of needs that people have. Here is a list that begins with very basic needs.

- **Physical needs:** food, water, shelter, clothing
- **Safety needs:** protection from harm
- **Friendship needs:** healthy, trusting, supporting relationships
- **Spiritual needs:** belonging to a fellowship, understanding truth, knowing the times in which we live, trusting in God

Jesus understood that people who were dying of hunger needed physical bread before their understanding of spiritual bread could be met. It is difficult for someone who is struggling to protect children from violence to spend time building friendships. We need to understand the basic needs of people around us and be the hands and feet of Christ to help meet those needs as we are able.

Different life events happen to people and can change their needs. When people lose their jobs they have a need to find work. If your neighbor’s child dies, he or she has a need for comfort. If your friend at work has marital problems then encouragement and support is needed. A Christian observes and understands that people have different types of needs. By meeting these needs we are following Christ’s method for reaching people for God.

HOW?

Let’s close this section by brainstorming different ways to meet different types of needs. [Invite people get into groups of four or five and think about how families can minister to those needs.]

1. Your neighbor’s son has a drinking problem. He has been thrown into jail a couple of times. Your neighbors are very discouraged about their son. How can you minister to them?

2. Your friend at work tells you that his wife has been diagnosed with a fatal disease. He feels like his world is falling apart and doesn't know how to cope. How can you minister to your friend?
3. The people who live a few houses down have very little food and clothing. The husband is disabled and receives no help from the government. They have three small children. How can you help them?
4. A neighbor girl, who is only 11 years old, is starting to dress immodestly. She really wants a boyfriend. Her mother is single and doesn't know how to help her daughter. She wants some guidance. How can you help out?

Step 4 – Winning People's Confidence

WHY?

Opening Exercise: Invite church members to break into small groups of four or five. Ask them to answer the following question: "Who do you really trust in this world? Why do you really trust this person? Think of someone outside of your family that you trust."

[Ask people to share for a few minutes in their small groups. Then invite a few people to share with the rest of the group.]

WHAT?

The fourth step in Christ's method of reaching people for God was to win the confidence of others. This begins by showing them love and compassion. We cannot force people to trust us. We must "win" their confidence. That usually happens through little steps over time.

The first three steps we discussed focus on reaching out to people. But in this step people begin to respond back. Your kindness builds a relationship. You cannot trick people into having confidence in you; it is built on many actions of care. Here are some characteristics of a trustworthy friend:

- They genuinely want what is best for you.
- They respect your property.
- They respect your decisions.
- They will not lie to you.

You do not have to be a *perfect* Christian to show care for someone else as a trustworthy friend. In fact, it can actually help your relationship to share your *own* struggles with another person. Some people think you have to be perfect in order to be a Christian or be baptized. That is actually a barrier in bringing people to Christ. A good witness for Jesus is carefully honest about sharing their own trials. A true Christian is willing to admit mistakes.

So how do you know if you have won the confidence of another person? You can tell when they begin to open up their heart to you. When people share their deepest needs, that means they have confidence in you. That means you need to be a good listener. People go through crises and face difficulties that can cause them to wonder, "What's the purpose of life?" Then they are ready to hear more about Jesus.

HOW?

There comes a time in a friendship when you can ask your friend a simple question. But this needs to happen at the right time. If you ask this question too soon, they are more likely to shy away. You can also ask this question too late. You will know to ask this question when someone opens their heart up to you with a problem: "Do you have any spiritual resources to help you with this?"

After you ask this question it is important to wait. Don't say anything else. Let the person think about your question. Don't give them a little sermon. Just wait. If they change the subject, then they may not be ready to learn more about Jesus at that moment. We must be careful—we are tempted to talk too much or push people at the wrong time. But if we allow the Holy Spirit to work on their heart, then they will let you know if they would like more help.

Your friend may say, "No, I don't have any spiritual resources." Then you might take the next step. Here are some examples of things you can do:

- Offer to **pray** with them
- Give them a **brochure** on a relevant topic
- **Invite** them to a church seminar
- Ask them if they would like to **study the Bible** together and look for answers in the Word of God.

The next section will talk more about this step.

Step 5 – Invite Them to Follow Jesus

WHY?

Opening Exercise: Invite church members to break into small groups of four or five. Ask them to answer the following question: "Share about when you first chose to follow Jesus. When did you make this decision? Who helped you most to make this choice?"

[Ask people to share for a few minutes in their small groups. Then invite a few people to share with the rest of the group.]

WHAT?

The fifth step in Christ's method of winning people to God was to invite them to follow Him. The story of the woman at the well in John 4 helps us understand how Jesus invited someone to follow Him. Even though there were many barriers between Jesus and this woman, He asks for a drink of water. He knows the woman is deeply hurting. Then, using water as a metaphor, Jesus talks to her about "living water."

Even though she changes the subject somewhat, Jesus still brings the message home to her heart: "Do you worship God in spirit?" Her heart is touched and she accepts the message.



In fact, she immediately goes to invite people to come and meet the Messiah. Here is a woman who is emotionally thirsty and Christ offers her the water of life. She wants to be loved and Jesus gives her the gospel, which will quench all of her thirsts in life.

There comes a point in our friendships with others, a time when we have won their confidence, that they will share a difficulty they are facing. It is then that we can ask them, "Do you have any spiritual resources to help you?" If they continue to open up, then we take the step of offering to help them learn more about Jesus.

HOW?

We discussed in the previous step that we can offer to pray with people or give them a brochure. But this might be the time to simply share the gospel with them. This is not a long sermon or complex Bible study. This is explaining to them the good news of salvation in a nutshell. There are many different ways you can do this:

1. God loves you and has a plan for your life. (John 3:16; John 10:10).
2. People have broken God's law. Our sins separate us from the Lord. (Rom. 3:23; Rom. 6:23).
3. Jesus has offered to take your sins upon Himself. Christ takes the penalty of sin (Rom. 5:8; John 14:6).
4. If we receive Jesus gift of taking our sins, if we confess our sins and accept Christ as the Lord of life we may be brought back into relationship with God and receive eternal life (John 1:12; Eph. 2:8-9).

At this point you may ask your friend, "Would you like to receive Jesus as your Savior?" If they respond positively, offer to pray with them. They may pray on their own, or they can repeat a prayer that you pray, sentence by sentence. That prayer may go like this:

"Dear Jesus, I realize that I have broken Your commandments. Please forgive me and wash away my sins. Please come into my heart. I receive You as my Lord and Savior. Thank you for giving me the gift of salvation. In Jesus' name, Amen."

Next, tell them that it would be good for them to study the Bible and pray every day in order for them to keep their faith in Jesus strong. Offer to give them Bible studies to help them grow in their decision to accept Christ.

You may also choose to share your own testimony with them. If you share how you have come to accept God into your life, keep these points in mind:

- Share genuinely from your heart. Don't try to memorize a speech.
- Avoid emphasizing your past mistakes. Be careful not to glorify the problems in your life.
- Don't feel like you need to share a long story with lots of details. Just keep it basic.
- Bring out God's love and grace. Give all the glory to Jesus for what the Lord has done.

*Some of these elements were adapted from the *Friend2Friend* resource available through AdventSource.

Appendix G

12 Tips on How to Give a Bible Study

BEFORE GIVING THE STUDY

1. First determine if a person is open and ready to receive Bible studies. Does someone genuinely want to learn and grow, or do they want to argue about religion? Or are they taking studies as a favor to you?
2. Find a Bible study partner to give the study with you. This person may teach you how to give studies while you watch and pray silently. Or you may have them pray while you give the study. Be sensitive to genders (both your Bible study partner and the person to whom you are giving the study).
3. What materials will you use when giving a Bible study? There are lots of resources you can buy and use from your Adventist bookstore. Ask your pastor or personal ministries leaders for materials. Some people mark up their Bibles and do not use any handouts.
4. Determine when you will meet. It is good to meet at least once a week. If you wait longer, people can lose their interest or get distracted with other things. Pick a time that works and stick with it so it will be easier to remember.
5. Decide where you will meet. Sometimes it is best to meet in their home. Other times it may be difficult to hold studies in a person's home if there are too many distractions.



ON GIVING THE STUDY

6. Begin all studies with prayer. Ask the Holy Spirit to be present and open the truths of God's word as you study.
7. Give one study at a time. Do not rush ahead, trying to tackle several studies at once (unless the Holy Spirit leads you to do this). It is usually better to do one study and let the person think about it, review the materials, and let the ideas sink in. Too much information can occasionally discourage and confuse people.
8. Handle questions carefully. If someone asks a question about an upcoming topic, respond with, "That is an excellent question. We are going to talk about that in depth in a future lesson." If you give them too many answers to all their questions, things could get confusing and some might lose interest.
9. What if you don't know the answer to someone's question? Don't be embarrassed. Just say, "That's a very good question. I'm going to study that this coming week and we'll talk about it next time we get together."
10. Remember that *you are not the one* to convict someone else of truth. That is the work of the Holy Spirit. Be faithful in preparing your studies, asking for God's guidance. It is the job of God's Spirit to lead them to choose to believe in Bible truth.
11. Early in your studies it is important that people understand the gospel. If they do not realize that you cannot work your way to heaven and that salvation is a free gift, they will become legalistic Christians. Make sure the gospel is presented early on in your studies.
12. As you come to the end of your studies you might ask the pastor to meet with the person and briefly review what has been studied. The pastor or another church leader can then help you determine if they are ready for baptism.



Appendix H

Sample Calendar Outline

	Pastor	Church Board	FTF Committee	Church Families
Month 1 PREPARE	Introduce FTF; Preach on family; Invite members to enroll	Hear about FTF; Vote on FTF; Establish FTF committee	Meet, review, begin planning	Hear sermon series; Enroll and receive <i>Family Guide</i>
Month 2 PREPARE	Continue FTF support; Hold day of fasting and prayer	Hear progress reports; Continue support	Plan calendar year; Collect resources for distribution	Devotionals; Prayer Journal; Fasting and Prayer
Month 3 CARE	Continue FTF support; Assist with training	Hear progress reports; Continue support	Conduct training on friendship evangelism; Provide brochures; Plan events	Choose one family; Attend training; Make first contact
Month 4 CARE	Continue FTF support	Hear progress reports; Continue support	Hold FTF meeting; Provide resources; Plan events	Invite family to a meal at your home; Attend FTF meeting
Month 5 CARE	Continue FTF support	Hear progress reports; Continue support	Hold FTF meeting; Plan church event	Build friendship with neighbor; Do kind acts
Month 6 CARE	Continue FTF support	Hear progress reports; Continue support	Hold FTF meeting; Plan another church event	Build friendship with neighbor; Do kind acts
Month 7 CARE	Continue FTF support	Hear progress reports; Continue support	Hold FTF meeting; Plan another church event	Build friendship; Invite to church events; share religious materials
Month 8 CARE	Begin preparations for evangelistic series	Focus on plans for evangelistic series	Hold FTF meeting; Train on how to give Bible studies	Continue contacts; Invite families to Bible studies
Month 9 SHARE	Begin preparations for evangelistic series; Hold day of fasting and prayer	Focus on plans for evangelistic series	Hold FTF meeting; Provide support for starting Bible studies in homes	Continue to hold Bible studies; Participate in day of fasting and prayer
Month 10 SHARE	Coordinate or hold evangelistic series	Hear progress reports; Support evangelistic series	Hold FTF meeting; Focus on evangelistic series	Invite families to evangelistic series; Attend meetings with families
Month 11 SHARE	Continue evangelistic series and conclude with baptisms	Skip board meeting this month	Skip meetings this month; focus on attending evangelistic series	Continue attending meetings with families
Month 12 SHARE	Preach on importance of small groups	Hear progress reports; Support small group ministry	Focus on setting up small groups; Organize banquet and baptism testimony time	Attend banquet with families being baptized; Hold small group Bible study in home

Appendix I

Blank Calendar

	Pastor	Church Board	FTF Committee	Church Families
Month 1				
PREPARE				
Month 2				
PREPARE				
Month 3				
CARE				
Month 4				
CARE				
Month 5				
CARE				
Month 6				
CARE				
Month 7				
CARE				
Month 8				
CARE				
Month 9				
SHARE				
Month 10				
SHARE				
Month 11				
SHARE				
Month 12				
SHARE				

Appendix J

Ellen G. White on the Family as a Witness to Neighbors

A well-ordered Christian household is a powerful argument in favor of the reality of the Christian religion—an argument that the infidel cannot gainsay. All can see that there is an influence at work in the family that affects the children, and that the God of Abraham is with them. If the homes of professed Christians had a right religious mold, they would exert a mighty influence for good. They would indeed be the “light of the world.” {*The Adventist Home*, p. 26}

When our own homes are what they should be, our children will not be allowed to grow up in idleness and indifference to the claims of God in behalf of the needy all about them. As the Lord’s heritage, they will be qualified to take up the work where they are. A light will shine from such homes which will reveal itself in behalf of the ignorant, leading them to the source of all knowledge. An influence will be exerted that will be a power for God and for His truth. {*The Adventist Home*, p. 36}

The first work of Christians is to be united in the family. Then the work is to extend to their neighbors nigh and afar off. Those who have received light are to let the light shine forth in clear rays. Their words, fragrant with the love of Christ, are to be a savor of life unto life. The more closely the members of a family are united in their work in the home, the more uplifting and helpful will be the influence that father and mother and sons and daughters will exert outside the home. {*The Adventist Home*, p. 37}

When religion is manifested in the home, its influence will be felt in the church and in the neighborhood. But some who profess to be Christians talk with their neighbors concerning their home difficulties. They relate their grievances in such a way as to call forth sympathy for themselves; but it is a great mistake to pour our trouble into the ears of others, especially when many of our grievances are manufactured and exist because of our irreligious life and defective character. Those who go forth to lay their private grievances before others might better remain at home to pray, to surrender their perverse will to God, to fall on the Rock and be broken, to die to self that Jesus may make them vessels unto honor. A lack of courtesy, a moment of petulance, a single rough, thoughtless word, will mar your reputation, and may close the door to hearts so that you can never reach them. {*The Adventist Home*, p. 38}

There are many who need the ministration of loving Christian hearts. Many have gone down to ruin who might have been saved, if their neighbors, common men and women, had put forth personal effort for them. Many are waiting to be personally addressed. In the very family, the neighborhood, the town where we live, there is work for us to do as missionaries for Christ. If we are Christians, this work will be our delight. No sooner is one converted than there is born within him a desire to make known to others what a precious friend he has found in Jesus. The saving and sanctifying truth cannot be shut up in his heart. {*The Desire of Ages*, p. 141}

One of the most effective ways in which light can be communicated is by private personal effort. In the home circle, at your neighbor’s fireside, at the bedside of the sick, in a quiet way you may read the Scriptures and speak a word for Jesus



and the truth. Thus you may sow precious seed that will spring up and bring forth fruit. {*Testimonies*, vol. 6, pp. 428, 429}

Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, "Follow Me." {*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143}

God is no respecter of persons. He will use humble, devoted Christians, even if they have not received so thorough an education as some others. Let such ones engage in service for Him by doing house-to-house work. Sitting by the fireside, they can—if humble, discreet, and godly—do more to meet the real needs of families than could an ordained minister. {*Testimonies*, vol. 7, p. 21}

My brethren and sisters, visit those who live near you, and by sympathy and kindness seek to reach their hearts. Be sure to work in a way that will remove prejudice instead of creating it. And remember that those who know the truth for this time, and yet confine their efforts to their own churches, refusing to work for their unconverted neighbors, will be called to account for unfulfilled duties. {*Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 34}

Visit your neighbors in a friendly way, and become acquainted with them ... Those who do not take up this work, those who act with the indifference that some have manifested, will soon lose their first love, and will begin to censure, criticize, and condemn their own brethren. {*Review and Herald*, May 13, 1902}

Go to your neighbors one by one, and come close to them till their hearts are warmed by your unselfish interest and love. Sympathize with them, pray with them, watch for opportunities to do them good, and as you can, gather a few together and open the Word of God to their darkened minds. Keep watching, as he who must render an account for the souls of men, and make the most of the privileges that God gives you of laboring with Him in His moral vineyard. Do not neglect speaking to your neighbors, and doing them all the kindness in your power, that you "by all means may save some." We need to seek for the spirit that constrained the apostle Paul to go from house to house pleading with tears, and teaching "repentance toward God, and faith toward our Lord Jesus Christ." {*Review and Herald*, March 13, 1888}

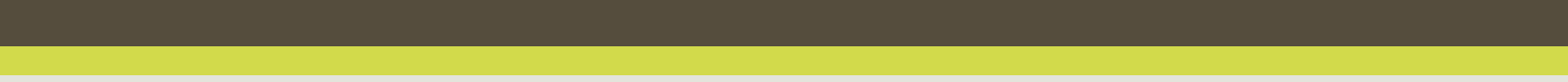
The Lord has presented before me the work that is to be done in our cities. The believers in these cities are to work for God in the neighborhood of their homes. They are to labor quietly and in humility, carrying with them wherever they go the atmosphere of heaven. {*Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 128}

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. {*Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 126}

Every follower of Jesus has a work to do as a missionary for Christ, in the family, in the neighborhood, in the town or city where he lives. All who are consecrated to God are channels of light. God makes them instruments of righteousness to communicate to others the light of truth. {*Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 632}

Notes

Notes



FAMILY-TO-FAMILY

Family-to-Family is a resource provided by the Department of Family Ministries of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church (adapted from *Familia por Familias* from the West Central Brazil Union Mission)

Available from the Department of Family Ministries of the General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventist Church at <http://family.adventist.org>

