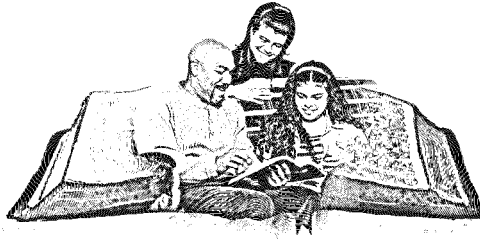


God's Word on Family Living



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 20:12, Ps. 18:2, Song of Solomon, Isa. 54:5, 62:5, John 10:11, 15:5, Eph. 5:21-25.*

Memory Text: “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (*Romans 15:4, NIV*).

The Week at a Glance: Within the pages of His Word, God has unfolded His plans and purposes for families.

Visitors to a science theater were given special eyeglasses. In the darkened room the group saw dramatic nature scenes on a large screen. First, they looked at the pictures without the glasses; afterward, they put the glasses on, and when they did, a photo of an orchard in full bloom brought gasps from the crowd: “Oh, how magnificent!” “What a difference!” It seemed as if the branches stuck out from the screen over their heads. Like these three-dimensional glasses, a change of perspective in looking at Scripture can help us see and appreciate old truths in fresh ways. This week we will put on *family glasses* and view the different ways in which God in His Word has revealed truths about families and family living. This perspective transforms the Bible into a contemporary textbook for life in our homes, as well as in the church, the household of faith.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 14.*

Family Commandments

One way in which Scripture presents its message on family life is through *relational directives*. Some of these command statements apply broadly to all relationships; some address neighborliness and friendship; while others are given for husbands, wives, parents, and children.

What do the following texts teach us about the kinds of “relational directives” we have been given by the Lord?

Exod. 20:12

Exod. 20:14

Deut. 6:6, 7

Prov. 5:18, 19

Eph. 5:21-25

Eph. 5:33

Eph. 6:4

Col. 3:20

1 Pet. 3:7

The quality of marriage and parent-child relationships are important to God. Three of the Ten Commandments focus directly on family life: “Honor your father and your mother” (*Exod. 20:12, NKJV*), “You shall not commit adultery” (*vs. 14, NKJV*), “You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife” (*vs. 17, NKJV*). Other specific directives flesh out God’s expectations for marriage, parent-child relationships, and life in families. General relational directives, such as “‘love your enemies’” (*Matt. 5:44, NIV*), “‘do to others what you would have them do to you’” (*Matt. 7:12, NIV*), and “‘love one another’” (*John 13:34, NIV*) apply equally to relationships at home.

Go back over those relational directives and ask yourself, In which area(s) do I need to make some changes, and what will it take in order for me to make those changes?

Key Text: *Ephesians 5:17, 21*

Teachers Aims:

1. To show that Bible truths are the guidelines for family living today.
2. To apply Bible principles to family relationships.
3. To stress the importance of the family's relationship with God.

Lesson Outline:

I. An Outline for Family Living (*Rom. 15:4*)

- A. The original Bible principles are still the standard by which we should live today.
- B. The Bible gives specific instructions on God's plan and purpose for family living.
- C. The role of each family member is outlined in the Word of God.

II. Principles for Healthy Relationships (*1 John 4:11*)

- A. The Bible gives specific behavioral guidelines for family relationships.
- B. According to the Bible, family members are to speak words of love and forgiveness to one another.
- C. The Scriptures admonish family members to look out for the needs of another.

III. Family Relationships Should Be a Reflection of Our Relationship With God (*Isa. 54:5, 66:13*)

- A. As a parent loves a child or as a husband loves his wife, God loves the church.
- B. The Bible images of God's love and of His relationship to the church reveal the importance of family relations to Him, as well.

Summary: The Word of God is still the standard by which we should govern family life. In it we find guidelines on how we are to relate to one another within the family unit. Healthy family relationships help lead us to a closer relationship with God.

COMMENTARY

I. Introduction

Last week we discussed four family types from a sociological perspective. This week we will learn more about the *Intentional Family* type.

II. Definition of the *Intentional Family*

Years ago our family took a canoe journey down the Delaware River in the eastern United States. Our trip was scheduled for ten miles, and along those miles we were expecting to see beautiful scenery and exciting wildlife while the current carried us lazily along. But we were unprepared for a 25-mile-per-hour headwind,

Family Narratives

Bible stories provide glimpses into people’s lives. The accounts show how, over the course of individuals’ lives, they reap the consequences of their choices and grow in spite of setbacks. Through these stories we see how God abides with His people, even through difficult times.

Capture the flavor of a Bible narrative by reading **Ruth 1 and 2** (you might even want to read the whole story). What lessons can you learn here about family living?

Not unlike many families today, this Bible family was hit by a series of life-changing losses. Famine, relocation to another country, death of her husband, and death of both sons left Naomi reeling. As the story opens, she despairs, feeling mournful, bitter, and alone. However, as this book shows so well, family means committed companionship. It means helping one another in troubled times and caring for the helpless. Ruth, Naomi’s Moabite daughter-in-law, exhibits extraordinary faith in God. She shows this by her loyalty and service to the despondent Naomi. Faced with incredible hardship, these two unfortunate souls finally get real help from a perceptive wealthy relative—Boaz. In fulfilling his legal responsibility (and also obviously acting out of love), Boaz marries Ruth. Those who enjoy a love story are treated to an example of the One who loves with an everlasting love, who does not rest until He, like Boaz, obtains the object of His love. In the end, the baby born to Boaz and Ruth softens the painful memories and provides joy for the present and hope for the future.

Ourselves in view. Stories like these are in the Bible for a purpose. They instruct, inspire, correct, and train God’s people in right living (*Rom. 15:4, 2 Tim. 3:16*). Readers find themselves in them and take comfort in the fact they are not alone in temptation and trial, in struggles and setbacks. The Scriptures’ honesty about the weaknesses and mistakes of others reveals pitfalls and how to avoid them. Further, we see good qualities we want to copy for ourselves. God’s longsuffering and patience inspire our hearts with courage and hope that He who never changes will be with us today also.

What could you learn from the story of Ruth that could help you and your family through a bad time?

and we had no idea how important it was to steer the canoe. What transpired was often comical, sometimes frightening, and usually just hard work. We encountered rapids, low-hanging tree limbs that drew us like magnets into their clutches, and constant wind. With a considerable sense of accomplishment, we finally reached our goal; but the journey was not what we had expected.

Family living can be much like that trip. We had one plan for the trip, but it became a constant work in progress. In spite of that, the trip was made easier because of the plan. Family members also must have a plan as they face the difficulties and challenges of their journey together. The plan will flex according to needs and circumstances. However, the goals set at the beginning may not need to change. Stephen R. Covey suggests that in setting family goals, one should start with the “end in mind.”—*The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families* (New York: Golden Books, 1997), p. 70. Believe us, being able to dock that canoe after our ten-mile journey was something we thought about along the way. And like the canoe, a family also must make allowances for *weather* conditions, keep steering in the right direction, and paddle like it really matters—because it does.

In the *Intentional Family*, members work together to stay on course, to keep reaffirming their goals, and to refocus their plan. Repeated activities and family customs keep the connections strong in addition to providing ongoing meaning to the journey. They build a sense of community that will keep the family balanced. What might some of these rituals be?

1. *Family worships*—These should be age-appropriate for the children in both time and content. Worships should reinforce God’s love, grace, and salvation, along with faith and hope. Each family member should have a role to play in these events. An established time for worship should be honored, with limited exceptions made.

2. *Bedtime routines*—These provide wonderful opportunities to focus attention on each child. Affirmations of love and support will become some of their most cherished memories.

3. *Eating together*—In this age of family *grazing*, the connections made during shared meals should not be underestimated.

4. *Annual vacations*—These also can help a family build community. It is important, however, that negative attitudes be left behind. Much family bonding can occur while hiking a mountain path, going on memorable camping trips, or during similar activities.

5. *Holidays*—Could it be that a family that celebrates together stays together? Traditional and cultural holidays are perfect times for family bonding.

6. *Sabbath observance*—In what special ways does your family begin and end Sabbath? Do you have special Friday-night suppers? Are Sabbath dinners shared with others in ways that make Sabbath more of a delight?

7. *Service*—Think of how you may have been blessed by easing

Principles of Relationships

Quite a different category of scriptural instruction about relationships is found in the Bible's presentation of *relational principles*. The book of Proverbs has the greatest collection of this material.

What truths do these examples of relational principles convey? How do you think the writer reached his inspired conclusions?

Prov. 12:25

Prov. 15:1

Prov. 17:9

Prov. 17:22

Solomon was a keen observer of nature, and because his capital, Jerusalem, sat right on the trade routes, he had contacts with people from many parts of the world. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, he made a special study of people; his careful observations, scattered throughout Proverbs, speak of universal principles that govern human feelings and reactions.

Principles implanted by the Creator. The universal principles of emotions and relationships Solomon observed reflect the truth described by Ellen White when she wrote, "The senses, the faculties of the mind . . . were placed under law."—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 415. Though sin has damaged God's creation, human behavior in relationships is still shaped by the laws He implanted within human beings. To discover and apply the insights gained from these principles is to acquire the keys to better family living.

How do you think these implanted relational principles have been affected by sin? What difference does the gospel make? Compare Matthew 12:34, 35 with Philippians 2:2-11 as you think about your answer.

Like an infectious computer virus, sin corrupts the core of human beings, rendering them self-centered and fouling the functioning of all their physical, mental, social, emotional, and spiritual processes. The gospel puts people right with God and with one another through Christ (2 Cor. 5:18, 19).

the load another carries. How could your family make a statement about your love for God by serving those with real needs? Remember that “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.’”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143.

Family routines can become rituals by emphasizing four factors (see William J. Doherty, *The Intentional Family*, pp. 11, 12):

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Ruth 1–4, Song of Solomon 1–8, Hosea 1:2–2:1, Luke 15:11–32*

- 1 The families described in the Bible are so diverse that they can hardly be described as *normal*. These stories remind us that envy, unfaithfulness, estrangement, heartache, and even violence are the fruits of living in a sinful world. We hardly should be surprised if these same things afflict modern families. Yet, God almost always brings something redemptive out of the most broken human relationships. What is redemptive about the stories of Joseph? Ruth? Rahab? David? Solomon? Hosea?
- 2 Read the wise sayings recorded in Proverbs 12:25; 15:1; 17:9, 22. Remember a modern saying repeated by someone in your family or one you often say that reflects a principle that strengthens relationships in your family or church.
- 3 The Song of Solomon is one of two books in the Bible that does not mention the word *God* (Esther is the other). How does this fact shape the way you regard this book? How do you explain the presence of the Song of Solomon in the Scripture canon? What do you think is its primary purpose?
- 4 God uses marriage and family relationships as metaphors to illustrate His relationship with individuals, as well as with the church. What image do you find most appealing when thinking of your own relationship with God? Why that one?
- 5 As mentioned in question 1 (above), not all family relationships in the Bible are models to be emulated; many of them contain lessons of things to avoid. What life lessons have you learned that you’d do differently if you could live your life over? What Bible promises do you claim in order to help you move past your mistakes?

The Royal Love Poem

Further insights on the principles governing relationships, especially the intimate life within marriage, are found in the divinely inspired poetry of the Song of Solomon.

Match the verses in Column A with the characteristics of intimate relationships found in Column B.

Column A	Column B
a. Song of Sol. 1:9, 14, 16; 2:3; 4:1, 3, 7; 5:10-16; 6:9; 7:1	__ Expressing commitment
b. Song of Sol. 1:15, 2:14, 4:9, 5:12, 6:5	__ Being totally honest, open, vulnerable with each other
c. Song of Sol. 1:2, 2:6, 7:8, 8:3	__ Using terms of endearment, expressing appreciation, giving affirmation and honest compliments
d. Song of Sol. 1:6, 2:2, 6:5, 8:10	__ Communicating face to face, making eye contact
e. Song of Sol. 2:10-13, 17; 7:11, 12	__ Treating each other as friends
f. Song of Sol. 5:16	__ Spending time together, playing together
g. Song of Sol. 2:16; 6:3; 8:6, 7	__ Showing feelings through touch

The Song of Solomon reflects upon the love between Solomon and a woman called “Shulamite” or “Shulamith,” who evidently was his first true love and leading queen (*Song of Sol. 6:9, 13*). The poem emphasizes aspects of their love rather than a chronological history of their relationship.

God draws back the curtain on marital intimacy. Through the experiences of this couple, the Bible presents the relationship principles involved in forming close friendships and in fashioning the intimate love and covenant commitment of marriage. God Himself chose marriage as a figure of His relationship with His people. Thus, the discoveries of love in this poem afford priceless insights into the grandest love relationship of all—the bond between Christ and the soul.

Why is it important to address the *heart*, as well as the *head*, in understanding relationships?

1. *Predictability*—Rituals occur regularly. If the children have to beg Dad to read them a story every Friday night, it is not a ritual.

2. *Connection*—Routines can be good times to build connections. Keeping certain routines, such as bedtime, positive and stress free can quickly turn them into pleasant rituals.

3. *Identity*—Tell children stories about their family. They love knowing where they came from, what is unique about their family, and who some of their notable relatives are.

4. *Enacting Values*—When values are enacted throughout certain routines, those routines can become rituals that teach those same values. Thus, specific routines involving the Sabbath day can become rituals through which children learn the value of worship and a day of rest.

In closing, it must be said that the material presented here is not a prescription of how to bring intentionality to families through the use of rituals. Families can be very diverse, whereby each family's needs may differ widely. That is why family members need to decide together what is needed and how to make it work. This may require some sacrifices and some reprioritizing. It likely will require becoming more intentional, but the potential rewards are great.

Witnessing

Twenty-six-year-old Todd, unchurched and single, regarded family life as a necessary evil for the biological perpetuation of the species. His own family background had been full of strife, repression, and wounded love. When he started experimentally attending the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Todd noticed that some of the families there were genuinely happy. He observed husbands and wives treat each other kindly and address their children with loving respect, not as *brats* and nuisances who constantly needed to be punished and held in check. This was a revelation to Todd. He accepted invitations to several Adventist homes where he had a chance to observe the family dynamics and was amazed by how richly gratifying home life could be. If it had not been for this practical, living demonstration of Christianity, Todd probably would not have joined the church, as he did one year later, and eventually married to raise a family, who joyfully shares the same faith and spiritual beliefs.

“The greatest evidence of the power of Christianity that can be presented to the world is a well-ordered, well-disciplined family. This will recommend the truth as nothing else can, for it is a living witness of its practical power upon the heart.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, pp. 31, 32.

Ask yourself, whether married or single: What can I do to make my home life a more effective witness in my community?

The Divine Parent and Marriage Partner

What family terms and imagery are applied to God in the following sets of texts? *Isa. 54:5, 62:5, Jer. 31:32 and Isa. 66:12, 13; Jer. 31:9; Hos. 11:1.*

God refers to Himself as the Husband of Israel. The imagery is repeated in the New Testament, where Christ is the Bridegroom and His bride is the church. God also is represented in Scripture as a parent, usually as a father, though some of the comparisons are maternal; for example “like a woman in childbirth” (*Isa. 42:14, NIV*) or as a “hen gathereth her chickens under her wings” (*Matt. 23:37*).

Gazing upon the perfect marriage Partner and Parent. Watching others is one of the main ways human beings learn. In His Word God permits us to gaze upon Him as the perfect expression of love in marriage and parenting. The family metaphors for God show us more of what our families can be like. They also have the effect of drawing us closer to Him as we come to know Him in family terms.

Principles for study. Comparisons that liken God to a husband or parent contain valuable principles for us to study. They are not intended, however, to be literal blueprints for the responsibilities of married partners or parents. The scriptural imagery is frequently tied to local customs. For example, in Ezekiel 16:6-14, God’s association with Israel is likened to the betrothal and marital customs of the time when a groom spread his garment over the bride, and she, in turn, was washed, anointed, and adorned in preparation for the wedding festivities. More important, the analogies are limited, because humans are not God. All human attempts at intimacy pale into insignificance when compared to the constancy, faithfulness, and closeness God displays toward those He loves. Yet, we are hopeful, for God has been revealed in Jesus Christ. He beckons us to love as He loved and to be empowered for such loving through the gift of His Spirit.

What other Bible images of God might be helpful to those whose memories or experiences in a marriage or with parents make these family metaphors painful for them? *See, for instance, Ps. 18:2, John 10:11, 15:5.*

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: Proverbs 22:6 urges us to “train up a child in the way he should go.” “What is meant by *train up*? . . . The original root word is the term for ‘the palate, the roof of the mouth, the gums.’ In verb form, it is the term used for breaking and bringing into submission a wild horse by a rope in the mouth.

“The term was also used in the days of Solomon to describe the action of a midwife who, soon after helping deliver a child, would dip her finger into the juice of chewed or crushed dates, reach into the mouth of the infant, and massage the gums and the palate within the mouth so as to create a sensation of sucking, a sense of taste. The juice was also believed to be a cleansing agent in the newborn’s mouth. Then she would place the child in its mother’s arms to begin feeding from the mother’s breast. So it is the word used to describe ‘developing a thirst.’ ”—Charles R. Swindoll, *You and Your Child* (Nashville, Tenn.: Word Publishing, 1998), pp. 5, 6.

A paraphrase of Proverbs 22:6 could read: “Develop in a child a thirst for the Lord, and when he is grown he will not depart from Him!”

Thought Question:

In both the human and the church family, oftentimes the ones in charge feel obligated to “train up” their charges by *making* them do the right thing. One reason for this forcefulness is a genuine interest in saving the souls of those in their care. Another reason is the literal interpretation of Scripture or of the Spirit of Prophecy, without considering the original meaning, use, and connotation of the passage. Think of incidents in churches and among families in which good intentions end with poor results. Share these with the class and come up with ways to avoid the same mistakes. What is the importance of *cutting the apron strings*, so to speak, in such instances? What about reliance on the Holy Spirit’s competence? How does the need for individuals to make their own choices and to learn from the consequences also factor into child rearing?

Application Question:

Evaluate the failed ministries of your church. Think of reasons why they did not succeed. Next, read the icebreaker and compare the church with the midwife. Is your church in the business of *training up* people for God? Come up with at least four different ways you can create a *thirst for the Lord* in your community.

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “Bible Biographies,” *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, pp. 9–15; *Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 19–22.

Selecting relevant Scripture. Though the Scriptures are the basis for understanding God’s plan for family living, not every statement applies literally to all people in all eras, such as the death penalty for a rebellious son (*Deut. 21:18-21*) or for a wife who had been sexually promiscuous before marriage (*Deut. 22:20, 21*).

Detecting God’s will for families as revealed in Scripture today involves:

- ❶ Studying the theological and historical context of the message
- ❷ Determining the original meanings of words
- ❸ Comparing texts on a topic with other similar passages, looking for corroboration by other Scripture writers, and understanding the application and adaptation made by New Testament writers of Old Testament material
- ❹ Discovering broad-based principles and even details that apply to today’s family issues

Discussion Questions:

❶ As a class, discuss this question: If there is any one factor that is crucial to a healthy family, what is it? Is there more than one factor? If so, what are they?

❷ As a class, go through some of the imagery used to describe how God relates to us. Who in the class prefers certain images over others, and why? What should these different preferences tell us about how God relates to different people?

Summary: Scripture employs a variety of means to convey instruction for family living. These include God’s direct commands, various marriage and family examples, proverbs describing relationship principles, and His own modeling as a divine Husband and Parent. Nurtured and guided by such revelation, family members grow closer to Him and to one another.