

2022
RESOURCE
BOOK



Adventist[®]
Family Ministries

I WILL GO WITH MY FAMILY:

FAMILY RESILIENCE

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER



Adventist®
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ALINA BALTAZAR, STEPHEN BAUER, KATELYN CAMPBELL WEAKLEY,
CLAUDIO AND PAMELA CONSUEGRA, KAREN HOLFORD, TAMYRA HORST,
ROBERTO IANNÒ, DAWN JACOBSON-VENN, S. JOSEPH KIDDER,
GEOFFREY MBWANA, JULIAN MELGOSA, JARED MILLER, KATIE MILLER,
TANYA MUGANDA, ERICK PENA, INGRID WEISS SLIKKERS



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Adventist® Family Ministries

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Managing Editor: Dawn Jacobson-Venn
Editorial Assistant: Karen Miranda
Design and Formatting: Daniel Taipe
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Contributors:

Alina Baltazar, Stephen Bauer, Katelyn Campbell Weakley, Claudio And Pamela Consuegra, Karen Holford, Tamyra Horst, Roberto Iannò, Dawn Jacobson-Venn, S. Joseph Kidder, Geoffrey Mbwana, Julian Melgosa, Jared Miller, Katie Miller, Tanya Muganda, Erick Pena, Ingrid Weiss Slikkers

Other Family Ministries Resource Books in this series:

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Department of Family Ministries
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
12501 Old Columbia Pike
Silver Spring, MD 20904, USA
family@gc.adventist.org
family.adventist.org

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PREFACE

Elephants are known for being resilient. While the leading threat to African elephants is wildlife crime—mainly poaching for the illegal ivory trade—the greatest threat to Asian elephants is the loss of habitat, giving rise to human-elephant conflict for land space. Despite these distressing realities, elephants continue to be resilient, with the help of conservationists.

When people endure difficult situations and bounce back despite the hardships they have experienced, that reality is also identified as resilience.

Dictionary.com defines resilience as: “the ability of a person to adjust to or recover readily from illness, adversity, major life changes, etc.” Essentially, resilience is by definition buoyancy; which is defined as “lightness or resilience of spirit.”

The global pandemic brought on by the virus identified as COVID-19 has brought tremendous physical, emotional and financial stress and distress to people around the world. Many thought that by now we would have left the pandemic in our rearview mirrors. Yet, as we write, the world has experienced almost two years of this plague that appears undiminished, despite the development of several vaccines to control its spread.

Ever since evil made its appearance in the Garden of Eden—when Adam and Eve ate of the fruit God told them to stay away from and sinned—humans have been challenged with constant dangers and threats.

Confronted with escalating problems and setbacks, the apostle Paul encourages the members of the church at Corinth by saying: “We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed” (2 Cor 4:8, 9 ESV). Fundamentally, a message about being resilient.

The theme for the 2022 Family Ministries Resource Book is *Family Resilience*. So, today we are calling on every pastor, every Family Ministries leader at every level, and every member of the church to take note of Paul's message of resilience. That as we focus on the primary mission of the church through the proclamation of The Three Angels' Messages—despite the attacks of the enemy—we will trust God for resilience in our families, as we do all we can to help hasten the coming of Jesus Christ.

Maranatha!

Willie and Elaine Oliver, Directors

Department of Family Ministries
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
World Headquarters
Silver Spring, Maryland
family.adventist.org



HOW TO USE THIS **RESOURCE BOOK**

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

CHRISTIAN HOME AND MARRIAGE WEEK: FEBRUARY 12-19

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

CHRISTIAN MARRIAGE DAY (EMPHASIZES MARRIAGE): SABBATH, FEBRUARY 12

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

CHRISTIAN HOME DAY (EMPHASIZES PARENTING): SABBATH, FEBRUARY 19

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

**FAMILY TOGETHERNESS WEEK OF PRAYER:
SEPTEMBER 4-10**

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

**FAMILY TOGETHERNESS DAY OF PRAYER:
(FOR MARRIAGES, FAMILIES AND RELATIONSHIPS)
SABBATH, SEPTEMBER 10**

Use the Family Sermon idea for the Sabbath worship service and the Week-of-Prayer resource that is provided.

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

This resource also includes Microsoft PowerPoint® presentations of the seminars and handouts. Seminar facilitators are encouraged to personalize the Microsoft PowerPoint® presentations with their own personal stories and pictures that reflect the diversity of their various communities. To download a presentation please visit: **family.adventist.org/2022RB**

A supplemental resource with daily readings and family activities will also be provided for the Family Togetherness Week of Prayer. To download this resource please visit: family.adventist.org/2022RB

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

SERMON IDEAS

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

RESILIENT PEOPLE, RESILIENT RELATIONSHIPS

BY WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

THE TEXT

MARK 7:24-30

I. INTRODUCTION

The most sacred symbol in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma (in the United States of America) is a tree: a sprawling, shade-bearing, 80-year-old American elm. Tourists drive from miles around to see her. People pose for pictures beneath her. Arborists carefully protect her. She adorns posters and letterhead. The city treasures the tree, not for her appearance but for her endurance.

She endured the Oklahoma City bombing (Wednesday, April 19, 1995).

Timothy McVeigh parked his death-laden truck only yards from her. His malice killed 168 people, wounded 850, destroyed the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building, and buried the tree in rubble. No one expected it to survive. No one, in fact, gave any thought to the dusty, branch-stripped tree.

But then she began to bud.

Sprouts pressed through damaged bark; green leaves pushed away gray soot. Life resurrected from an acre of death. People noticed. The tree modeled the resilience the victims desired. So, they gave the elm a name: the Survivor Tree.¹

Today, many marriages and family relationships—in and out of the church—are experiencing a similar type of assault, intimidation and violence; threatening to destroy their very

Willie Oliver, PhD, CFLE and **Elaine Oliver**, PhDc, LCPC, CFLE
are Directors of the Department of Family Ministries at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
World Headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, USA.

existence. Yet, like the resilient *Survivor Tree* in Oklahoma City we must find them, help them, and nurture them back to emotional, physical, and spiritual health, regardless of who they are, what they look like, where they come from, and what they own. We must help them to survive and thrive and be accepted into the family of God before it is too late.

Our topic today is titled, *Resilient People, Resilient Relationships. Let us pray.*

II. THE TEXT

MARK 7:24-30 (A Gentile Shows Her Faith)

²⁴ From there He arose and went to the region of Tyre and Sidon. And He entered a house and wanted no one to know it, but He could not be hidden. ²⁵ For a woman whose young daughter had an unclean spirit heard about Him, and she came and fell at His feet. ²⁶ The woman was a Greek, a Syro-Phoenician by birth, and she kept asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter. ²⁷ But Jesus said to her, ‘Let the children be filled first, for it is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs.’ ²⁸ And she answered and said to Him, ‘Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs under the table eat from the children’s crumbs.’ ²⁹ Then He said to her, ‘For this saying go your way; the demon has gone out of your daughter.’ ³⁰ And when she had come to her house, she found the demon gone out, and her daughter lying on the bed.” NKJV

III. EXPLICATION AND APPLICATION

Dictionary.com offers the following definitions for resilient: “returning to the original form or position after being bent, compressed, or stretched.” Also, “recovering readily from illness, depression, adversity, or the like; buoyant.” Like a tennis ball that gets hit at great speeds, yet, readily recovers its shape and is ready to face another menacing tennis racket.

The setting for the story in Mark 7:24-30 finds Jesus coming from having a major conflict with the religious leaders about ceremonial uncleanness when He encounters the Syrophenician woman. As a rule, Jews didn’t have contact with Gentiles because this made them ceremonially *unclean* according to their tradition. And even though Jesus was not in any way disregarding the importance of the kind of food that was good to eat, He shows by His example that what’s in a person’s heart—that which results in their actions towards others—is what truly matters. So, Jesus illustrates how ridiculous the tradition of the elders was when He takes the time to talk with this Gentile woman—the Syrophenician—who was in great need.

By using this story, Mark makes the point that God’s mission of salvation includes Gentiles. That the gospel of God’s love and kingdom are not limited to Israel, even though Jesus indicated that Israel must have the first opportunity. The truth is Mark’s motive for using the example of

the Syrophoenician woman in this passage is because he wanted his Roman (Gentile) readers to understand that the good news of salvation was for everyone, including them. That message is still true for us today.

Reading the narratives of the Gospels very carefully will lead us to recognize that only once before had Jesus crossed over into Gentile territory—in Mark 5:1-20 when He met a demon-possessed man in the country of the Gadarenes on the eastern side of the Sea of Galilee. However, this time Jesus appears to stay in the region for some time. He had traveled to Phoenicia—which is present-day Lebanon—where the city of Tyre was located, without an obvious public ministry agenda in mind. The biblical account seems to indicate that Jesus was looking for a place to rest with His disciples and to escape the persecution of the religious leaders who were always following Him. He knew the scribes and Pharisees did not want to defile themselves by going into Gentile territory. Yet, despite his efforts to get some rest, Jesus was unable to keep his presence in the region a secret.²

It is important to observe how God's providence works in His mission to "seek and save the lost" (Luke 19:10), despite the barriers erected by the social customs of His day. While it is true Jesus was attempting to get some rest with His disciples after a difficult time with church leaders who had twisted God's plans to suit their preferences; it should not escape our attention that the major focus of Jesus was to always alleviate the pain of people and give them access to His life-giving presence. Ellen White describes this scene in *The Desire of Ages* by stating: "In coming to this region He hoped to find the retirement He had failed to secure at Bethsaida. Yet this was not His only purpose in taking this journey."³

Matthew Henry—the great English Bible expositor of the 17th century—describes what is taking place with Jesus while in the region of Tyre and Sidon when he suggests:

*How graciously he was pleased to manifest himself, notwithstanding. Though he would not carry a harvest of miraculous cures into those parts, yet, it should seem, he came on purpose to drop a handful, to let fall this one which we have here an account of. He could not be hid; for, though a candle may be put under a bushel, the sun cannot. Christ was too well known to be long incognito-hid, any where; the oil of gladness which he was anointed with, like ointment of the right hand, would betray itself, and fill the house with its odours. Those that had only heard his fame, could not converse with him, but they would soon say, 'This must be Jesus.'*⁴

Interestingly, the rules the religious leaders had put in place to separate themselves from other people rather than allowing God to use them as instruments of His grace to those in great need unquestionably make this story provocative in the Gospels. Ethnic divisions, prejudice and social separation, seem to be more important to these church leaders than accomplishing God's purpose for calling Israel as His special people. We must admit, though, that the encounter of the Syrophoenician woman with Jesus breaks all kinds of social boundaries and customs as seen through the perspective of the Jewish leaders. "In the thinking of first-century Palestine this woman had a

number of inabilities. She was a Gentile, a woman, and perhaps a single parent. But none of those factors kept her from approaching Jesus for help, or from engaging in a challenging conversation with Him.”⁵ The Syrophenician woman demonstrates remarkable resilience in the face of overwhelming odds.

Giving a more complete description to the context of the central character unfolding in the story, Ellen White shares:

“The people of this district were of the old Canaanite race. They were idolaters, and were despised and hated by the Jews. To this class belonged the woman who now came to Jesus. She was a heathen, and was therefore excluded from the advantages which Jews daily enjoyed. There were many Jews living among the Phoenicians, and the tidings of Christ’s work had penetrated to this region. Some of the people had listened to His words and had witnessed His wonderful works. This woman had heard of the prophet, who, it was reported, healed all manner of diseases. As she heard of His power, *hope sprang up* in her heart. Inspired by a mother’s love, she *determined* to present her daughter’s case to Him. It was her *resolute* purpose to bring her affliction to Jesus. He must heal her child. She had sought help from the heathen gods, but had obtained no relief. And at times she was tempted to think, what can this Jewish teacher do for me? But the word had come, He heals all manner of diseases, whether those who come to Him for help are rich or poor. She *determined* not to lose her only hope.”⁶

What becomes abundantly clear in the text—to the discerning Bible reader—is that “the desperate need of her daughter and her radical faith in God’s goodness caused her to humble herself before Jesus—falling at His feet—and risked crossing all kinds of social barriers.”⁷ The Syrophenician woman, no doubt, knew about Jesus and believed He was a prophet sent from God. In Mark chapter 3, Jesus healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath. The Pharisees were angry about what Jesus did and went out immediately to plot with the Herodians to destroy Him. Mark 3:7, 8 gives us clues about how the woman may have known about Jesus. The text shares: “But Jesus withdrew with His disciples to the sea. And a great multitude from Galilee followed Him, and from Judea and Jerusalem and Idumea and beyond the Jordan; *and those from Tyre and Sidon*, a great multitude, when they heard how many things He was doing, came to Him.” Here is a tangible clue of how the woman may have found out about Jesus. Perhaps a cousin or a friend of the Syrophenician woman had been in the crowd that had witnessed the power of God in Jesus and came back to Tyre and Sidon with news about the Rabbi from Galilee.

In vs. 26, we encounter the conversation between Jesus and the Syrophenician woman—most likely in Greek, rather than Aramaic—according to several commentators.^{8 9 10} Although not

Greek by birth (since she was Syrophenician), she evidently had been Hellenized in her culture and language, the reason the text refers to her as being Greek. “Let the children be filled first,” Jesus says to her in vs. 27, “for it is not good to take the children’s bread and throw it to the little dogs.” The language Jesus uses in His conversation with the woman sounds like fighting words. These words are really demeaning, degrading and hurtful. But the Syrophenician woman demonstrates incredible resilience, as she remains focused on the objective of her mission—the healing of her daughter from an unclean spirit.

Jews often used the word ‘dogs’ to refer to Gentiles. And although it seems out of character for Jesus to do so, He almost certainly used the term in the same way. The obvious meaning was to point out that Jews took precedence over Gentiles during the time of the ministry of Jesus. Yet, Jesus somewhat softens the harshness by using the diminutive form of dogs, which could be translated as ‘puppies,’ with reference to house pets rather than the scavengers on the streets. The seeming roughness of Jesus’ words could have served to test the woman’s faith.¹¹ Yet, she holds fast to her motivation for coming.

Commenting on the out-of-character response of Jesus to a woman in pain and torment, Ellen White says in *The Desire of Ages* (p. 401): “Although this answer appeared to be in accordance with the prejudice of the Jews, it was an implied rebuke to the disciples, which they afterward understood as reminding them of what He had often told them,—that He came to the world to save all who would accept Him.”¹²

Despite the seemingly sarcastic, cynical, and biting response of Jesus to the Syrophenician’s request to cast the demon out of her daughter (vs. 26); her faith would not be deterred. In fact, her resilience—recovering readily from adversity—she remains steadfast, in what may be dramatized by the words of the negro spiritual sang by James Cleveland, that says: “I don’t feel no ways tired, I’ve come too far from where I started from. Nobody told me that the road would be easy, I don’t believe He brought me this far to leave me.”

Jesus had left an opening by stating that the Gentiles would get their turn to hear the gospel and profit from his ministry. As far as the Syrophenician was concerned, that time was now. In fact, it was time to *seize the moment*—carpe diem. She agreed with Jesus that Israel was first. But her radical faith refused to believe she was excluded. In fact, she answers in vs. 28: “Yes, Lord, yet even the little dogs under the table eat from the children’s crumbs.” By responding in this way, she expressed persevering faith and belief in God’s goodness. She sees the barriers of race, culture, and gender as superficial issues in the face of her great need. The genuine requirement is authentic healing on the inside, and only the gospel can rise above these barriers to create such healing for this soul, desperate for her daughter’s healing.¹³

Demonstrating the depth of her faith in God, despite the social barriers between Jews and Gentiles; Jesus honors her resilience as we read in vs. 29: “For this saying go your way”; He says to her, “the demon has gone out of your daughter.”

Contrasting the resilience and profound faith of the Syrophenician woman with the superficial spirituality demonstrated by the scribes and Pharisees, Ellen White shares:

“Jesus had just departed from His field of labor because the scribes and Pharisees were seeking to take His life. They murmured and complained. They manifested unbelief and bitterness, and refused the salvation so freely offered them. Here Christ meets one of an unfortunate and despised race, that has not been favored with the light of God’s word; yet she yields at once to the divine influence of Christ, and has implicit faith in His ability to grant the favor she asks. She begs for the crumbs that fall from the Master’s table. If she may have the privilege of a dog, she is willing to be regarded as a dog. She has no national or religious prejudice or pride to influence her course, and she immediately acknowledges Jesus as the Redeemer, and as being able to do all she asks of Him.”¹⁴

The highpoint of this story is found in vs. 30 that says: “And when she had come to her house, she found the demon gone out, and her daughter lying on the bed.” Halleluiah!!! Praise God from Whom all blessings flow!

The resilient faith of this unassuming, yet undeterred Syrophoenician woman, allowed the power of God to work on behalf of her household; healing her daughter from the unclean spirit that had tormented her. The Syrophoenician woman modeled in a clear way what it means to wrestle with God and not let Him go until He blesses you. She must have known something about Jacob’s story in Genesis 32:26, where he cries out as he wrestles with the angel of God: “I will not let You go unless You bless me!”

IV. CONCLUSION

The opposite of depression isn’t happiness, writes Peter D. Kramer in his book *Against Depression*. The opposite of depression is resilience. It’s not the absence of guilt and sadness, but it is the ability to find a path away from those feelings. Jesus frees us to be resilient and to find the path to abundant life.¹⁵

The challenge before us today, as persons who have been favored with a knowledge of God’s salvation and grace, is to do something to represent the real purpose of our faith. How we can be resilient people with resilient relationships. We must determine not to be like the scribes and Pharisees—majoring in minors—when people are dying of COVID-19, and so many families are in deep and dangerous despair. We must not allow ourselves to be held back by matters of minor importance like cultural, ethnic, and racial biases that tend to separate us from people in need of our care and regard.

People of God, it is almost midnight in the history of our world. We must be serious about taking advantage of the opportunities given to us by God to introduce Jesus to our neighbors, relatives, and friends. Rather than squandering opportunities that come our way, we must intentionally determine to be salt and light to Syrophoenicians in our circles of influence who are floundering in darkness and despair every day.

There are women and men, husbands and wives, mothers and fathers, parents and children, widows and divorcees, grandparents and single adults who need our support and interest in their brokenness and pain. Behaving like the scribes and Pharisees—arguing about useless dogmas, conspiracy theories and political ideologies—will render us ineffective, fruitless, and unproductive, like salt that has lost its flavor (Luke 14:34). So, it is time to wake up from our slumber and sleep. It is time to make up our minds and say to ourselves in the strength of the Lord: “I Will Go with My Family” to the Tyres and Sidons of my specific context, trusting in God’s providence, power, and grace to send a resilient Syrophenician who is looking for a miracle to rid her family of the grip of the evil one, and find deliverance in the Christ we claim to know, through the assistance of our love and concern.

May we, like the Syrophenician woman, find the path to Jesus, and with unfaltering resilience, beg for the crumbs of His blessings. May we also be eager to share the blessings we have received with joy and delight to wondering seekers in need of God’s saving love and grace. Then we will be able to join in singing that powerful hymn of the church:

1 I love to tell the story of unseen things above,
of Jesus and his glory, of Jesus and his love.
I love to tell the story, because I know ‘tis true;
it satisfies my longings as nothing else can do.

Refrain

I love to tell the story, ‘twill be my theme in glory,
to tell the old, old story of Jesus and his love.

2 I love to tell the story; more wonderful it seems
than all the golden fancies of all our golden dreams.
I love to tell the story, it did so much for me;
and that is just the reason I tell it now to thee.

3 I love to tell the story; ‘tis pleasant to repeat
what seems, each time I tell it, more wonderfully sweet.
I love to tell the story, for some have never heard
the message of salvation from God’s own holy Word.

4 I love to tell the story, for those who know it best
seem hungering and thirsting to hear it like the rest.
and when, in scenes of glory, I sing the new, new song,
‘twill be the old, old story that I have loved so long.¹⁶

When Jesus comes again, it is our desire that, like the resilient *Survivor Tree* in Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, despite the attacks and assaults of Satan, we too will be resilient people in resilient relationships and be able to stand firm through the grace of God. May God bless us today and always as we trust him with our family relationships and all other relationships to be salt and light until Jesus comes again.

NOTES

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- ¹⁵ The Great Lion of the Lord (December 11, 2005). *Homiletics Online*. Retrieved September 22, 2021, from <https://www.homileticsonline.com/members/installment/93000107>
- ¹⁶ Hankey, A.K., Fischer, W.G. (1866) I love to tell the story. In *The Seventh-day Adventist hymnal*. (1985). Washington D.C. review and Herald.

YOU WILL RISE AGAIN

BY GEOFFREY MBWANA

TEXTS

John 16:33

Matthew 20:19

1 Cor 15:22

2 Cor 4:8-10; 16-18

Luke 12:8

Gen 37-41

The pandemic caused by the COVID-19 virus has disrupted our lives in ways we never imagined. The effects of the disease have brought great suffering upon many, not only through sickness, but because millions of precious lives—many of them our loved ones—have died. The virus has brought much pain and heartache. We are still healing from wounds, while at the same time carrying huge scars because of the aftermath. Our endurance has been overstretched. Family relationships have been tested. We are still crying out—who will heal our wounds?

We can look to the past, in times like these, and gather instructions on how to best navigate our present reality. More than two thousand years ago, Jesus warned His disciples in John 16:33, “In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” Even though the trials we have experienced due to the COVID-19 pandemic have been severe, we can take comfort in God’s word. Jesus did not only warn us that we would experience difficulties while

Geoffrey Mbwana, M.A. is a General Vice President at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists World Headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, USA.

living on this earth; He cheers us up by encouraging us to contemplate on His victory. Because He overcame, we too can overcome in the power of His name if we so choose.

When the disciples of Christ were about to go through the extreme challenges surrounding the death of Jesus, he also assured them that on “the third day He will rise again.” (Matthew 20:19) This was bitter-sweet information that the disciples could not fully comprehend or even accept until they saw their Master crucified. A great storm of doubt and disbelief as to whether he was the Messiah engrossed them. Then on the morning of the third day, just as he told them, he rose again. Ellen G. White describes it this way, “He burst from the tomb and rose triumphant over death and the grave.”¹ This remarkable victory is totally complete in Jesus; however, it was not restricted to Him alone. The Apostle Paul repeats the message to assure all humanity today, “For as in Adam all die, even so in Christ all shall be made alive.” (1 Corinthians 15:22) **Yes, we will rise again!** What a tremendous assurance! We will spring back to life after we have been stricken dead by the worst of the enemies of life, death! Even before we experience death, we encounter multiple life situations that knock us down. Jesus, who experienced humanity by living in our midst helps us repeatedly to rise up victoriously—by being resilient—after tragedies befall us in this life.

Rubber has characteristics that are admirable when applied to life situations. If bent, compressed, stretched, or bounced, it ultimately returns to its original form or position upon release. These qualities of elasticity, buoyancy, pliancy, flexibility, and recoil render its preferred usability in various situations and circumstances because of how they adopt to those situations. Resilience, like rubber, is essential to life.

When hardships strike, we feel the pain as we cry, and mourn. We grasp for an escape, for healing and hope. In those times, we are stretched like rubber. When it has passed, we may remain to linger in the after-effects of the catastrophe. Such lingering can be short with some, longer with others, and still others just can't shake it off. How do we cope with these hard knocks of life that we are certain to encounter in this world? The good news is that we have a lot of guidance and counsel from Him who overcame. Counsel that has been tried in the fire and found to work. We have solid examples that were written to instruct us. As we take time to listen as we read the counsel, we too will be led to victory. The Apostle Paul, when he wrote to the Corinthians, illustrated resilience in the following counsel: “We are hard-pressed on every side, yet not crushed; we are perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed— always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body.” (2 Corinthians 4:8-10)

Like sweet music in our ears—in the middle of afflictions—we can choose to hear the sweetest sound from our Lord Jesus Christ saying: **‘you will rise again.’** After every crushing situation there can be a rising again. If not in the physical realm, then surely in the spiritual domain. When this keeps recurring, habits are formed, and character is built. We are being recreated into the original image of God. Let's look at an example that illustrates resilience in Christian life.

YOUNG RESILIENT JOSEPH

At the age of 17, Joseph, the most beloved son of Jacob, received a perplexing dream which he probably did not recognize was from his Creator God. In the dream he saw the activity of binding sheaves, “Then behold, my sheaf arose and also stood upright; and indeed, your sheaves stood all around and bowed down to my sheaf.” (Genesis 37:7) In attempts to seek help in understanding the dream, Joseph was misunderstood by his elder brothers as implying the horrible reality that such a young family member would rule over them. At that point, what he thought was an exciting dream turned out sour with his siblings. A repeat testimony of another dream of “the sun, the moon, and the eleven stars bowed down to me” (Genesis 37:9) only served to aggravate the jealousy and prevailing hatred that existed because of the preferential treatment he received from his father. Even though his father, Jacob, was amazed to hear the dreams, he kept the matter in his heart. This second attempt to share the dream was probably a reflection of Joseph’s youthful innocence or possibly of his courage, boldness, and curiosity.

The first major crackdown experienced by Joseph was when his father sent him to visit his brothers, who at the height of their hatred conspired to kill him. Reuben, his eldest brother, intervened to preserve his life. The unfortunate painful moment of cruel separation from loved ones came as they mercilessly threw him into a pit, then sold him as a slave to the Ishmaelite traders. The brothers lied to their father that a wild animal had killed Joseph. If you ask how Joseph dealt with the series of traumatic hardships he encountered during this part of his life, I propose that he chose to connect.

CONNECT WITH GOD BY TRUSTING

Joseph landed in Egypt as a slave in the house of Potiphar, the captain of the guard of Pharaoh. The most beloved son of his father was now a slave in a foreign land with no hope of ever seeing his family again. With no one else to turn to, Joseph chose to trust God and resolved to remain faithful to Him. Joseph determined that whatever he was given to do, he would do it as to the Lord. Joseph served with excellence and integrity, remaining faithful to his God. He did not want to disappoint God. When he was enticed by Potiphar’s wife to commit sin, he responded, “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?” (Genesis 39:9) Because Joseph never gave up on God, God never gave up on him. As a result, “The Lord was with Joseph, and he was a successful man.” (Genesis 39:2) Although he was thrown away by his own blood brothers, made to suffer a long separation from family, he clung to God. Here lies the secret to true lasting resilience. Trusting God with all one’s heart will help anyone rise again. Joseph can be seen bouncing back triumphantly by literally thriving in favor of this earthly master of the then most powerful kingdom on earth. Joseph was successful because he connected and trusted Jesus Christ, the King of the universe

CONNECT THROUGH EXCELLENCE AND INTEGRITY

The moment Joseph began enjoying the favors he received, another terrible blow struck. The lady of the house who attempted to entice him into sin turned against him and accused him of wanting to rape her. This did not sit well with her husband, the captain, so Joseph was thrown into jail. Joseph went from being the overseer of Potiphar's house, blessed by God, to an Egyptian prison house. We can imagine how devastating this blow was on Joseph. It was bad enough to be separated from family by the evil act of his siblings. It was bad enough to be away from his home country, and made a slave, but now, to be in a prison house in Egypt for false accusation was nearly unbearable! It would be understandable if he sunk again in desperation for this terrible plight. He was not only in the pit of a prison but also a pit of hopelessness and discouragement. Was this to be the final deadly blow that would crash Joseph into nothingness? No! Not with Joseph. He chose a different route.

Joseph did not resist imprisonment. There is no record that he waged an intense legal battle to defend his innocence. Despite the unfair circumstances he found himself in, Joseph did not allow what was beyond his power to bury him in despair. During the difficult reality of prison life, Joseph continued to trust in God and purposed in his heart to be the best person he could be. "But the Lord was with Joseph and showed him mercy, and He gave him favor in the sight of the keeper of the prison" (Genesis 39:21). Joseph excelled with the same integrity that landed him in prison, becoming a leader of prisoners. Joseph didn't need supervision by the prison guard because "the Lord was with him; and whatever he did, the Lord made it prosper" (Genesis 39:23). It is worth noting that God honored Joseph's trust in Him, and his determination to be his best regardless of the circumstances. As honoring and trusting God remained priorities of Joseph's life in prison; God showed him favor through the Prison Keeper, and the prisoners themselves; another high point in Joseph's journey with God.

CONNECT WITH PEOPLE THROUGH CARING SERVICE

While still in prison, the chief butler, and the chief baker, two of Pharaoh's officers who wronged the king, were sent to this same prison, and kept under the charge of Joseph. After some time in the prison, the two officers had a troubling dream. Joseph, who suffered separation from his family, chose to connect with others in prison. He noticed the concern of the two officers and sought to help them with interpretation of their dream. Within three days, just as Joseph had predicted, the butler was reinstated to his position in the palace, and the baker was beheaded, as per Joseph's interpretation of the baker's dream. Joseph had not become overly concerned or devastated by being falsely accused and imprisoned. He genuinely cared for the welfare of those under his care and did not shy away from using the gifts God had given to him to bless others. God-given gifts are powerful tools that when put to unselfish use by generously loving and serving others, could lift anyone from the pits of desperation to a happy life of service to others even under trying circumstances. Whenever we find ourselves beaten down, consider what God has put in your hands and choose to use it for the good of those within your sphere of influence. Love the people and serve them with humility.

CONNECT BY ACKNOWLEDGING GOD IN EVERYTHING

In Joseph's journey of repeated beatings and bouncing, there came a time when Pharaoh had a dream. The Butler who had been in prison with Joseph remembered a gifted young Hebrew who interpreted their dreams and made mention of their story to the king. The king sent for Joseph to be brought to help interpret his dream. When the king inquired whether Joseph understood and interpreted dreams, Joseph did not take credit for the gift but directed it where it was due. He said, "It is not in me; God will give Pharaoh an answer of peace" (Genesis 41:16). So Pharaoh repeated his dream, and Joseph interpreted the dream that the magicians and everyone else in Egypt, could not interpret. Joseph also advised Pharaoh about what he should do to avoid the loss of life among persons of the greatest kingdom on earth during the seven years of severe hunger that will come after seven years of bumper crops. In this situation, Joseph bounced back by lifting the name of his God as the only one who is able. This was the perfect thing to do when all the gods of Egypt and the magicians failed to interpret the vision for the King. Moments of desperation are the most appropriate time to acknowledge God, who is the hope of the world.

The immediate response from Pharaoh was, "Can we find such a one as this, a man in whom is the Spirit of God?" (Genesis 41:38) *Amazingly* he answered his question by affirming Joseph that "there is no one as discerning and wise as you. You shall be over my house, and all my people shall be ruled according to your word; only in regard to the throne will I be greater than you." And Pharaoh said to Joseph, "See, I have set you over all the land of Egypt." (Genesis 41:39-41)

What a great moment for Joseph! An amazing rise to power in a foreign land. This was a bouncing that Joseph never imagined would happen to a young Hebrew slave in a foreign land without any support from family. The recording of this story in scripture is to assure us that "whoever confesses Me before men, him the Son of Man also will confess before the angels of God." (Luke 12:8) Remember God will help us to rise again from whatever hardships we face, through the power of the Holy Spirit! This time around, Joseph bounced back by acknowledging the goodness and greatness of the God in heaven before a people who did not know this God.

In life, it doesn't help to brood over our disappointments, pains, frustrations, and injustices. Rather it pays to concentrate on doing everything possible to release others in such predicaments using our God-given abilities, skills, knowledge, and expertise. As we do that, we are gradually lifted from our own pathetic circumstances to be placed on a pedestal God chooses for us. Joseph trusted God and continued to be the best person he could be even in the worst of circumstances. By using the very gifts God had given him, he cared more about others' welfare than his own. He exercised and retained consistency by leading a life of integrity tested through adversity and proven to work. Through it all, Joseph strictly maintained his identity as a young God-fearing Hebrew who trusted God and waited for God to bring him back to prominence again and again. In that partnership, he was not ashamed to acknowledge such a God, even to strangers.

CONNECT THROUGH LOVE AND COMPASSION

The greatest test for Joseph came when God led his brothers to meet him face to face for the first time since the day they banished him into destruction. Joseph was now at the peak of success. His tormentors were right before him although they did not recognize him. Joseph's dreams had now become a reality. Would Joseph remain on the raised platform of godly maturity or stoop down into a pit of hate and revenge on his brothers? It was time to see the impact of the ups and downs that life had upon Joseph's character.

Humanly, this would have been the best opportunity for revenge. But Joseph demonstrated what happens to someone who clings to the Lord through the ups and downs. Character develops through such times, helping us grow closer to God. Through a trying experience, our character is formed and cemented.

“An upright character is of greater worth than the gold of Ophir. Without it none can rise to an honorable eminence. But character is not inherited. It cannot be bought. Moral excellence and fine mental qualities are not the result of accident. The most precious gifts are of no value unless they are improved. The formation of a noble character is the work of a lifetime and must be the result of diligent and persevering effort. God gives opportunities; success depends upon the use made of them.”²

Joseph proved what he was made of by turning the opportunity for revenge to a moment of forgiveness, restoration, and healing. He made it to be what God intended for every individual or family in strained relationships, a moment of unity and togetherness. When things happen to disrupt the family, please remember, you can rise again. And when that moment comes, it also becomes an I WILL GO moment to build relationships, to reconcile, bring stability, forgive, heal, and bring togetherness. Yes, YOU WILL RISE AGAIN! And as you do, help others to rise again.

CONCLUSION

Like Joseph, God has given us a vision for our lives. It might not be as dramatic as Joseph's, but God has a work for us individually and collectively. The vision may appear to be hazy sometimes. Depending on where we are, we may not fully comprehend God's plan. In fact, it can appear to be impossible, and we may be tempted to brush it aside as just another dream. Let us choose to cooperate with God:

1. By constant prayer and study of God's word
2. By trusting God completely
3. By submitting in obedience to God's leading in our lives
4. By choosing to love and serve others unconditionally
5. By recognizing the gifts God has given us, and choosing to use them to bless others

God will cause the dream he gave us to come true. He will give us courage, strength, and a spirit of endurance. And always remember, if you choose, You Will Rise Again. Paul gave Corinthians this assurance that is ours today:

“Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward *man* is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding *and* eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen *are* temporary, but the things which are not seen *are* eternal.” (2 Corinthians 4:16-18)

Like Joseph, the going may be rough and bumpy, choose to connect as Joseph did – trusting God, leading a life of integrity and excellence, serving others, acknowledging God in everything, and loving others while exercising compassion. This is how Joseph bounced back from every pit he was thrown into. Through the power of the Holy Spirit, we too will rise again and gladly proclaim; I WILL GO.

NOTES

- 1 Ellen G White, *The Truth About Angels*, 209. (*The Signs of the Times*, May 30, 1895).
- 2 Ellen G White (1958). *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pg. 223. Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press Publishing Association.

LIKE A RUBBER BALL

BY CLAUDIO & PAMELA CONSUEGRA

TEXT

“We often suffer, but we are never crushed. Even when we don’t know what to do, we never give up. ⁹In times of trouble, God is with us, and when we are knocked down, we get up again.” (2 Corinthians 4:8-9 CEV)

INTRODUCTION

You may remember many years ago when toymakers brought out a *SuperBall*. This ball, which looked much like any other rubber ball, was invented by Norman Stingley in 1964 and was made of extremely elastic materials, which caused it to bounce much higher than any other ball up to that time. I remember throwing it against the ground as hard as my young arm could and watching it bounce way over the roof of my house and continuing to bounce on the ground many more times after. In fact, according to Wikipedia, “it can fly over a three-story building.”

The Superball possesses the property of being incredibly resilient. It has the ability to bounce back, to withstand and recover quickly from very difficult conditions – like being thrown hard against the pavement. This ball is resilient because it is able to recoil or spring back into shape after bending, stretching, or being compressed. This amazing ball is

Claudio Consuegra, DMin, is the Director of the Department of Family Ministries at the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventist in Columbia, Maryland, USA.

Pamela Consuegra, PhD, is Associate Director of the Department of Family Ministries at the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists in Columbia, Maryland, USA.

awesome to play with, as long as your arm can keep throwing it against the ground. But the *SuperBall* is not the only rubber ball that bounces. Other rubber balls are resilient too, each one according to the materials with which it is made.

People are also resilient. Resilience is the ability to manage your reactions to stressful situations, bounce back from painful events, and function well even when bad things happen. The good news is that resilience isn't something you either have or don't have. Everyone is born with a measure of resiliency which then can be fostered so that it grows and is strengthened. At the same time, resiliency is not something we use up and lose. Rather, we build resilience throughout our lives—especially when we find ways to get through a challenge. It is sort of like a muscle – the more we use it, the stronger it gets.

While the Bible does not use the words resilience or resilient, it does describe what it is. In our text for today, the Apostle Paul wrote: “We often suffer, but we are never crushed. Even when we don't know what to do, we never give up. ⁹In times of trouble, God is with us, and when we are knocked down, we get up again.” (2 Corinthians 4:8-9 CEV) Paul was very resilient. He reminded the church members of the church in Corinth of all the things he experienced as a believer and missionary for Christ:

“I have worked harder and have been put in jail more times. I have been beaten with whips more and have been in danger of death more often. ²⁴Five times the Jews gave me thirty-nine lashes with a whip. ²⁵Three times the Romans beat me with a big stick, and once my enemies stoned me. I have been shipwrecked three times, and I even had to spend a night and a day in the sea. ²⁶During my many travels, I have been in danger from rivers, robbers, my own people, and foreigners. My life has been in danger in cities, in deserts, at sea, and with people who only pretended to be the Lord's followers. ²⁷I have worked and struggled and spent many sleepless nights. I have gone hungry and thirsty and often had nothing to eat. I have been cold from not having enough clothes to keep me warm. ²⁸Besides everything else, each day I am burdened down, worrying about all the churches.” (2 Corinthians 11:23-28 CEV)

But despite all the hardships, Paul bounced back and continued to move forward. As he told the members of the church in Philippi:

“Not that I have already attained, or am already perfected; but I press on, that I may lay hold of that for which Christ Jesus has also laid hold of me. ¹³Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, ¹⁴I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus. ¹⁵Therefore let us, as many as are mature, have this mind; and if in anything you think otherwise, God will reveal even this to you.” (Philippians 3:12-15 NKJV)

The Bible encourages us to press on (Philippians 3:13–15), to overcome hardships and temptations (Romans 12:21), and to persevere in the face of trials (James 1:12). But God’s word also provides many examples of people who suffered greatly but continued to follow His plan for their lives.

Perhaps we could even choose Proverbs 24:16 as a sort of theme song for a life beset with hardship. “For the righteous falls seven times and rises again, but the wicked stumble in times of calamity.” (Proverbs 24:16 ESV)

God knows we need special encouragement at times, so He stands by us and whispers in our ears the words of Paul: “In all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us.” (Romans 8:37 ESV)

If anyone needs resilience more than ever before it is today’s families. Just think for a moment about all that families have had to endure just in the last twelve months. But even if we take COVID-19, the pandemic, and the quarantine out of the equation, families are constantly bounced hard against the pavement of life.

RESILIENT SPOUSES

[NOTE: PLEASE INSERT YOUR OWN ILLUSTRATION HERE] Just today, as we were preparing this message, we received an urgent appeal from a woman we do not know. In that e-mail, she pleaded for help because her marriage is falling apart. Her husband told her he wants to move on because he has no love for her. He had an adulterous relationship some time ago. He told her that it was because she had not shown any sexual interest toward him, that she didn’t seem interested in having sexual relationships with him, so he looked elsewhere to someone else to meet his need.

She said she had forgiven him and wanted to have a good, healthy, happy, lasting marriage, but he does not want to. One of the many tragedies from this story is that there’s a child caught in this web, a child who will witness the breakup of his parent’s marriage, the destruction of his family.

But it doesn’t have to happen. We have also known and worked with couples who have had serious marital problems, including multiple affairs. Yet they were able to rebuild their relationship with God and with each other. One couple has been together, strong in their faith and faithful to their marriage vows, for over twenty years since they gave themselves and their marriage to God. They, like Paul, claimed the promise, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” (Philippians 4:13 NKJV)

Resilient couples have discovered that if they are going to bounce back from whatever the world and the devil throw their way, they don’t play the blame game. Unlike our forefathers, Adam and Eve, resilient couples face their troubles together instead of pointing the finger at each other. Accept responsibility for your issues and things you have done instead of hiding behind accusations of blame toward the other. Finger-pointing deflates you, and eventually, you may not be able to bounce back again.

Another thing we have learned about resilient couples is that they are able to find humor even in difficult situations. It doesn't mean that you don't take your concerns or problems seriously. One couple noticed that if their fights were beginning to spiral out of control, it often helped if one was willing to break the tension by smiling, opening their arms, and exclaiming: 'Let's hug it out!' Please make sure that finding humor during tough moments does not mean you make fun of the other person. Not only is that disrespectful, but it does nothing to help the already problematic issue you are facing.

Resilient couples don't want to simply survive, they want to thrive. So, when they see themselves beginning to sink, they ask for help. They don't wait until they're already drowning; they ask for help early rather than too late. It takes courage to ask for help, but resilient couples know that all couples face difficulties at one time or another; it is part of life. The key is knowing when you can take care of the situation on your own or when you need help from outside. And by help from outside, we don't mean a relative or a friend, but a skilled professional.

You might think that resilient couples are strong all the time. The truth is that these couples have learned to be vulnerable with each other and are not afraid to confide with their spouse about their fears and hopes. At the same time, they respond compassionately to what their spouse discloses.

Good, healthy communication is a key ingredient in the life of successful couples. Resilient couples don't expect their spouse to read their minds but express openly, clearly, and assertively what it is they think and feel, what they like or dislike, and what they want or wish. At the same time, resilient couples don't gloss over or ignore problems but rather are committed to solving them. They have a genuine desire to move forward and continue their journey of marriage together until death do them part.

Resilient spouses enjoy being together. During the pandemic, many couples got to stay home for days, weeks, and even months and truly enjoyed spending time with each other, even while working in front of their computer screens. I think of an older couple that had some marital, emotional, and perhaps even spiritual issues. Twice he lied about her to save his own skin. She forced him to father a child with another woman and then nagged him into getting rid of the woman and her son. They grew old without the joy of having their own child. But despite their conflicts, challenges, and complications, they enjoyed each other's company. In their old age, Abraham and Sarah still enjoyed being together, and even being intimate with each other.

Resilient couples are grateful and thankful to each other, for one another, and to God. Resilient couples set goals together instead of making individual decisions apart from the other. Above all, resilient couples have learned that they can't do without God's help. They have learned to believe and love the words from the book of Proverbs: "Trust in the LORD with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding. ⁶In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make straight your paths." (Proverbs 3:5-6 ESV)

RESILIENT PARENTS

If there's something that every parent dreads, it is the death of their child. They pray they will never have to taste that bitter pill. Many couples don't survive such tragedy and the loss of their child often results in the demise of the marriage.

Resilient couples make it past the valley of the shadow of death and maintain a balance between normal grief and a return to a new normal without their child in their lives. I think of couples like Adam and Eve and how they must have mourned the death of their second child, Abel, at the hands of his older brother. But they found solace and peace in the birth of their third son, Seth. Mary, the mother of Jesus, didn't sit to weep alone in her home. The book of Acts tells us that she gathered with Jesus' disciples in the upper room, and there Jesus met with them after His resurrection. (Acts 1:2-14)

Job, that saint of the Old Testament, demonstrated incredible resilience, and God honored him for it. Please remember that he had lost literally everything he had. All he had left was his health, but then calamity struck again, and he became ill. Job was in great agony physically and emotionally, and yet he refused to curse the Lord or give up. The bible tells us: "In spite of everything, Job did not sin or accuse God of doing wrong." (Job 1:22 CEV)

His life companion even challenged him: "Why do you still trust God? Why don't you curse him and die?" (Job 2:9 CEV) But for Job that was out of the question. When he most needed a friend, he received the visit of three of his closest companions, and one extra visitor, a younger man than they were. As long as they kept quiet, and they did that for seven days, they gave Job just what he needed. They sat quietly with him for seven days and seven nights (Job 2:13). But then they tried to convince him that his suffering and his losses were his own fault. He had no children, no workers, no income, no support from his wife or his closest friends, but despite his suffering, Job knew that God was in control, and that knowledge helped him maintain resilience instead of giving in to defeat. His faith resulted in resiliency.

Often as parents, we wonder if we have done our best in raising our children. Have I been patient enough? Have I prayed enough? Have I been a good example? As a parent, resilience is about finding a way to be the parent you want to be, no matter what else is going on around you. And when our children disobey, rebel, or walk away from everything we have taught them, it is easy to blame ourselves for their choices and decisions.

During these difficult moments, see what helps you calm down, tap into your inner strength, but also into the strength that comes from above. Resilient parents have learned to find something they can do to take care of themselves each day, so they can, in turn, take better care of their children. Make sure you carve out some time for yourself to do something you find relaxing or refreshing. It may be some exercise, drink your favorite hot drink in the morning, read a book, or pick up the phone and talk with a trusted friend.

When we're in the midst of a challenging situation, we feel as if it's never going to end, but you need to remind yourself that this too will pass. Maintain hope for a better

future and hold on to the promise of a better tomorrow. When you feel like you're sinking in quicksand, it's easy to think only of yourself, but you must check in with each of your family members to find out how they are feeling, what they are missing, or what made them laugh today.

Even in the saddest moments, look for moments of joy and encouragement, no matter how small. Don't isolate yourself. Even if your church is temporarily closed, stay connected to your faith community online, by phone, or by handwritten letters. Our faith can be a powerful reminder to be grateful for the good things in your life and to have hope for the future.

RESILIENT CHILDREN

We have heard it say many times: "children are very resilient." And that's true, up to a certain point. When they are little and just learning to walk, they often fall and cry. As new parents, we hurt for them, and our heart breaks to see them in pain. But those little humans get back up and keep trying until they are moving and running around the house faster than we can keep up with them. A scraped knee, a cut of a finger, or even a broken bone heals, and often they show their scars as a sort of badge of honor.

At the same time, children are deeply affected by trauma, abuse, and the divorce of their parents. Even adult children of divorce are hurt by the actions and decisions of their parents.

Why is it that some children seem to fare better than others? The fact is that everyone is born with a measure of resiliency that can be nurtured or hindered by life situations. Some kids naturally seem more resilient, while others seem to develop this trait over time and through managing their own trials. In some ways, resilience just means "work through the tough stuff, and the next time it won't seem so tough after all."

One of the vital components of resilience is the ability to look at a problem and find a solution. The wonder is that we as parents can help develop this trait in our kids by encouraging them to participate in solving the small dilemmas that happen throughout the day. It would probably be easier for us to simply do things for them, but then they would never learn. That's why trying to "fix" their problems, instead of encouraging them to find a solution on their own, can be more harmful than helpful. What are you doing for your kids that they could do themselves? Ask them to consider what it would take to solve the problem. If they are thirsty, what can they do about it? If their toy broke, what do they need to fix it? Or what did they learn so they will be more careful next time? What if they can't find their tennis shoes? Pose the question, "what do you think we should do about that?" or "How would you find it?"

Don't expect all your children to do the same things at the same time and in the same way. Your older kids can be responsible for getting out of bed on time and studying

for the math exam, while younger ones might need more direct help and encouragement. Perhaps the older kids can help the younger ones with their struggles.

All of us find it easier to learn when we receive encouragement, so praise your children with purpose. Even God, our Father, expressed encouragement and praise for His Son. Twice the Father spoke these words: “This is my beloved Son in whom I am well pleased” (Mat 3:17, 17:5). Your children need to receive such positive reinforcement for their good actions. “Good boy!”, “Wow, you’re so smart!”, “This picture should be hanging in a museum!”, “I am so proud of you!” Say those words as soon as you see them do good things. And make sure your praise focuses on the strategies your children use (“That’s awesome how you solved that problem”), specific jobs they did well (“Your room looks so nice and clean!”), and especially their effort throughout the challenges they faced (“I can see your hard work is showing in this project”).

Paul reminded young pastor Timothy, “For God gave us a spirit not of fear but of power and love and self-control.” (2 Timothy 1:7 ESV) As parents, we set the bar for our children. They learn by watching us. They learn from us how to interact with people and the world around us, what is acceptable, and inappropriate behavior. When we face our own challenges, do we fall apart, yell and scream, throw things against the walls, or hurt others? We model the behavior for our children to emulate. Or we can show them by our example how to make good decisions, what choices are best, and what to do even when people treat us unkindly and unfairly. “Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me.” (Micah 7:8 ESV)

RESILIENT FAMILIES

Why are we talking about resilience in today’s message? Unless you have been living in a cave during the last year or two, you know we have been going through some of the most difficult, challenging days of our lives. Millions have been infected by a deadly virus and many have died. We all probably know at least one person who died as a result of this deadly virus.

But there have also been other side effects of the pandemic, and many of them will be felt for a long time to come. Spouses and parents have lost their job, their income and have not been able to keep their home. Their children have lost their friends.

And yet, despite of the bleak environment, many families have not only survived but thrived. With the Apostle Paul, we can say: “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.” (Romans 8:18 ESV)

As we consider the promises of a better world, we can accept the words of Paul as a down payment on the treasure that awaits us. But what about the here and now? What about these days when we may still not be able to see our loved ones? We encourage you to remain connected even when you can’t be together.

As parents, it's easier to handle parenting challenges when we stay connected to our family, friends, and neighbors that we have positive relationships. Having caring people in our life helps us feel secure, confident, and empowered.

Stay in close contact, even if from a distance, at least once a day with people you care about and who care about you. A text message, an e-mail, or preferably a short phone call or video chat can be meaningful to both. At least once a week, try to have longer conversations.

CONCLUSION

One of the many blessings of being Christians is that God gives us that resilient spirit to keep bouncing back. The key to resiliency is faith in the Lord:

King David, who was persecuted by family and by the king, still wrote, "If you do what the LORD wants, he will make certain each step you take is sure. The LORD will hold your hand, and if you stumble, you still won't fall." (Psalm 37:23-24 CEV)

And James, the Lord's brother, assures us, "Blessed is the man who remains steadfast under trial, for when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life, which God has promised to those who love him." (James 1:12 ESV)

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WE WILL GO: FAMILIES FOLLOWING GOD'S COMMAND

BY JARED MILLER

TEXTS

Joshua 1:9

Luke 10:2

Exodus 4:19-20

Exodus 12:1-3

Genesis 12:1-3

Acts 18:24-26

INTRODUCTION: OUR STORY

The initial desire of my wife and I to serve the Lord in a foreign land took place during our seminary studies at Andrews University over a decade ago. We thought the timing was perfect. We did not have any kids yet, allowing both of us to work full time in mission service. The Lord seemed to be opening all the doors for us. But after receiving one solitary phone call, the doors were slammed shut. Our dream of mission service was dashed to pieces. We were extremely disappointed.

The Lord began resurrecting that dream six years later. We attended the 2015 General Conference Session in San Antonio, Texas, and Homer Trecartin, at that time, president of the Middle East North Africa (MENA) Union Mission, gave a compelling and convicting report of the vast unreached area in MENA.¹ Later that same year, we took some youth from our district

Jared Miller, DMin is the Pastor for the Middle East University Seventh-day Adventist Church in Beirut, Lebanon.

to the Generation of Youth for Christ conference in Louisville, Kentucky, and Homer Trecartin spoke again. He said the harvest was plentiful, as Jesus said, but the workers were few—especially in MENA.² He made an altar call, inviting young people to come forward and serve God as missionaries, even if it meant they may die in the mission field, never returning home to their families again. Many young people went forward, but we stayed in our seats. Later, when we talked, Katie said she felt that God was calling us to work in the Middle East, but I did not see any possibility of that happening.

To my surprise, about two months later, a colleague called and asked whether we would have any interest in pastoring in Beirut, Lebanon. That unexpected phone call began the exciting and somewhat frightening process of the Lord leading us to the Middle East. As we seriously asked God to reveal His will for our ministry, He quickly opened the doors and made His will known. When our house sold after being listed for just three weeks and my doctoral program allowed me to continue my project implementation as planned, we knew He was calling us overseas.

It was during this time that we read this statement: “If the followers of Christ were awake to duty, there would be thousands where there is one today proclaiming the gospel in heathen lands. And all who could not personally engage in the work, would yet sustain it with their means, their sympathy, and their prayers. And there would be far more earnest labor for souls in Christian countries.”³ God convicted us that we needed to leave our district, our family ministries departmental role, and our comfortable life in the United States (US), in order to share the gospel in a foreign land—Lebanon.⁴

Since God opened all the doors and made it clear He was calling us overseas, our family of four moved to Middle East University in Beirut in 2016. Within five months, our third daughter was born at a local hospital. Serving the Lord in Lebanon as a family has been an amazing and fulfilling experience. At the same time, mission work is not easy for families.

BEIRUT PORT BLAST

On August 4, 2020, Beirut was rocked by a massive explosion at the port. It was one of the largest non-nuclear explosions ever, killed over 200 people, injured 6000, and caused billions of dollars of damage throughout the city.

Our family lives about five miles from the port. We felt the blast at our home that early evening. The earth shook, and we initially thought it might have been an earthquake. We immediately dashed outside, looked down upon the city, and wondered what had happened. Had Beirut been bombed? Was the country under attack? It was a frightening time for me, my wife, and our three young daughters.

The devastation, uncertainty, and fear caused by the massive explosion led some people in Lebanon to immediately make plans to leave. The blast brought up painful memories of the 15 years of civil war. Some people fled due to the fear of history repeating itself.

In tough situations like that, God encourages families with these words, “Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9).

Since God is with us, our families can be resilient in the face of the many challenges we face while doing God’s work.

Here is how resilience is defined: “the ability of a person to adjust to or recover readily from illness, adversity, major life changes, etc.; buoyancy.”⁵

Sometimes God calls families to serve in difficult places. And if He calls, He will also give the strength and resilience to families to endure and persevere through the many challenges that come when we follow God’s call to serve.

BIBLICAL STUDY

Today let’s look at several stories of how God called various families to leave where they were to go live and serve Him in another area.

MOSES & FAMILY

Moses received a special call to serve when God spoke to him from the burning bush. God called him to go back to Egypt, the very place he had fled from 40 years before. But when God called Moses, his life was much different from when he fled as a single man. Now he was married, with two small children.

Exodus 4:19-20 says:

Now the LORD had said to Moses in Midian, “Go back to Egypt, for all the men who wanted to kill you are dead.” So, Moses took his wife and sons, put them on a donkey, and started back to Egypt. And he took the staff of God in his hand.

Moses’ two sons were likely very young—perhaps a toddler and the second one “an infant.”⁶ With his young family, he obediently followed God’s call to go to Egypt. However, on his way, he had second thoughts about bringing his young family on this potentially dangerous mission of confronting the king of Egypt. Ellen White provides these important details:

With his wife and children, Moses set forth on the journey. He had not dared to make known the object of his mission [to his father-in-law], lest they should not be allowed to accompany him. Before reaching Egypt, however, he himself thought it best for their own safety to send them back to the home in Midian.⁷

For Moses and his family, he decided temporary separation from his wife and young boys would be the safer option, and the better option for his wife Zipporah. Again, Ellen White reveals:

[Zipporah] was... greatly distressed at the sight of suffering; and it was for this reason that Moses, when on the way to Egypt, had consented to her return to Midian. He desired to spare her the pain of witnessing the judgments that were to fall on the Egyptians.

Going as a family on the mission assignments God gives is not easy. Sometimes difficult sacrifices need to be made for the sake of the family. Surely the family reunion of Moses with his wife and two sons recorded in Exodus 18 must have been a joyous one.

ABRAHAM & FAMILY

Abraham and his family were also called by God to go, leave their extended family, and go live in a new land that God had chosen for them. Genesis 12:1-3 says:

Now the LORD had said to Abram:

“Get out of your country,

From your family

And from your father’s house,

To a land that I will show you.

I will make you a great nation;

I will bless you

And make your name great;

And you shall be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you,

And I will curse him who curses you;

And in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed.”

This move was not just Abram and his wife Sarai. His nephew Lot and his family moved with them and all of Abram’s possessions and household servants. Abraham and his wife obeyed God’s call to go, and their obedience impacted the lives of many others. After all, God promised that all the families of the earth would be blessed through him—ultimately through his descendant Jesus Christ. The Gospel of Matthew begins with these words, “*The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham*” (Matthew 1:1). Abraham had a choice—to obey God and go or not to obey and remain with his extended family. He obeyed, and through his family, all families were blessed. Likewise, if we obey God’s call, our families will be a blessing to many other families.

Leaving his family and going to an unknown place took a lot of faith in God, as Ellen White says:

Abraham's unquestioning obedience was one of the most striking instances of faith and reliance upon God to be found in the Sacred Record... The patriarch went wherever God indicated his duty; he passed through wildernesses without terror; he went among idolatrous nations, with the one thought: "God has spoken; I am obeying His voice; He will guide, He will protect me." Just such faith and confidence as Abraham had the messengers of God need today. ⁸

Going as a family wherever God calls requires faith and confidence in God.

A MARRIED COUPLE

In the New Testament, we find another married couple that are committed to obeying the Lord's calling to go and serve Him. Priscilla and Aquila were coworkers with Paul as tentmaking evangelists. After being kicked out of Rome, they served with Paul first in Corinth and then traveled together to Ephesus.

This ministry couple influenced many people for the Lord Jesus Christ. One example of their ministry after traveling to Ephesus is recorded in Acts 18:24-26 when they lovingly help another gospel worker understand the truth more fully:

[Apollos] was a learned man, with a thorough knowledge of the Scriptures. He had been instructed in the way of the Lord, and he spoke with great fervor and taught about Jesus accurately, though he knew only the baptism of John. He began to speak boldly in the synagogue. When Priscilla and Aquila heard him, they invited him to their home and explained to him the way of God more adequately.

What a great example of husband and wife working together for the Lord, wherever He calls them to go. God has a work for both men and women, husbands and wives. Ellen White writes:

The Lord has a work for women as well as for men... The Saviour will reflect upon these self-sacrificing women the light of His countenance, and will give them a power that exceeds that of men. They can do in families a work that men cannot do, a work that reaches the inner life. They can come close to the hearts of those whom men cannot reach. Their labor is needed. ⁹

As Jesus said, "The harvest is plentiful, but the workers are few. Ask the Lord of the harvest, therefore, to send out workers into his harvest field" (Luke 10:2). God used workers in the past,

such as Priscilla and her husband, Aquila. God is looking for couples like that today as well—husbands and wives who are willing to serve the Lord as a family.

A WIDOWER AND HIS TWO YOUNG CHILDREN

The family of John Nevins (J.N.) Andrews, one of our very influential church pioneers, answered God's call to go serve Him as well. The family served the Lord and the church in various places around the United States. Sadly, John's wife Angeline died in 1872 after suffering a second major stroke. John was left a widower. The responsibility to raise their two children, Charles and Mary, fell upon him alone.

Around a year later, James White suggested that J.N. Andrews be sent overseas to Europe as a missionary. It took time for all the details to be worked out. In 1874, the General Conference voted to send Andrews to Europe as our first official Seventh-day Adventist missionary. A few months after the vote, Andrews boarded a ship along with his children Charles and Mary. Charles was 16 at the time, and Mary almost 13.

J.N. Andrews obeyed God's call to go to Switzerland—even as a widower with two teenage kids. Here's how Mervyn Maxwell describes what took place:

Andrews, still grieving the death of his wife Angeline two years earlier, departed as a 45-year-old single parent, accompanied by Charles, 16, and Mary, 12. The children proved to be extraordinary young pioneers, editing, translating, setting type, helping tirelessly to establish the international missionary journal, *Les Signes des Temps* (*The Signs of the Times*).¹⁰

Andrews was a courageous father—going to a new mission field with his teenage kids. His overseas mission experience had its trials and tribulations. Certainly, the most challenging experience for him was when his daughter Mary got sick with tuberculosis in 1878. Andrews and his family had traveled back to the U.S. for the General Conference Session. Mary received the best care possible at the Battle Creek Sanitarium, but sadly she passed away in November.

Mary had developed as an invaluable editorial assistant and proofreader for the magazine and as an emotional support for her father. He was shattered by the loss, staying in the United States for a further five months trying to regain his own health.¹¹

When we go serve God with our families, even our children can be active in service. Even as a young person, Mary made an important contribution to the work her family had been called to do.

Andrews eventually returned to Europe and continued God's work. His sacrifice and commitment to serve the Lord wherever He called is outstanding. Andrews continued

servicing in Europe until he himself got tuberculosis and died in 1883, at the age of 54. He is buried in Switzerland.

CHILDREN'S INVOLVEMENT

Several years ago, my family and I enjoyed a Sunday afternoon walk near the Mediterranean Sea on a bustling street full of walkers, runners, bikers, and other families enjoying time together. My wife and I were talking, and I was pushing our youngest daughter in the stroller. Our oldest daughter saw a boy about her age kicking a soccer ball around as we walked along. She took the initiative and started playing with him.

Katie and I thought this would quickly end, and our family would keep on walking. However, after 10-15 minutes of them playing, we ended up back-tracking to where they were and meeting the boy and his father. The two of them were out enjoying the day as well. Our kids made friends quickly, and after that, the adults followed in conversation and a friendship developed.

We have kept in touch with the dad and his son for the last several years, including meeting up for play dates, the boy enrolling in our church's Adventurer club. Now his dad has been doing Bible studies with me for several months.

Without our daughter Angela making friends with Adam, we probably would have never met his dad. In turn, the friendship and subsequent Bible studies would have never taken place.

When we go serve God as families, we should expect, encourage, and ask God to use our children, whatever their age, to reach others for Him as well.

TAKE AWAY LESSONS (CONCLUSION)

What can we take away from all these stories of families who followed God's call to go? Here are several lessons:

1. God calls our families to be strong and courageous because He is with us wherever He sends us.
2. God will give families the strength and resilience to endure and persevere through the many challenges that come when we follow God's call to serve.
3. Going as a family on the mission assignments God gives is not easy.
4. We have a choice to make. If we obey God's call, our families will be a blessing to many other families.
5. God has a work for both men and women, husbands and wives.
6. No matter the composition of your family, God calls you to go serve Him. Whether you are a single parent with teenagers, or a young family with infants and toddlers, God can call you to serve Him.

7. When we go serve God as families, we should expect, encourage, and ask God to use our children, whatever their age, to reach others for Him as well.

May all of our families say “Yes” to God’s call to go. That might mean going next door, going to your neighborhood, going to a new city or town within your country, or it could mean going to a foreign country. Let’s go with our families and follow wherever Jesus leads.

NOTES

- ¹ The population of Lebanon is over 6 million, with approximately 300-400 Seventh-day Adventists.
- ² See Matthew 9:37.
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CHILDREN'S STORIES

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

ON THE MOVE WITH JESUS!

BY DAWN JACOBSON-VENN

TEXTS:

Genesis 28:15, Joshua 1:9,
Isaiah 41:10, Matthew 28:20

PROPS

Moving Boxes and a suitcase. You could arrange to have several kids bring up boxes when they come for the story and stack them up around you. This will spark curiosity and interest in both children and adults.

SONG

Anywhere With Jesus I Can Safely Go (*This hymn could be sung during the service or played as children come up for the story*).

Have you ever moved? It is exciting to think about moving to a new place and making new friends. But it might also be a little sad, and even scary because you will be leaving your home, your friends, your school and familiar places. I have moved several times, so you know what I'm talking about if you have moved.

Dawn Jacobson-Venn, MA is Administrative Assistant for the Department of Family Ministries at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists World Headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, USA.

What are some reasons we move? (*let children respond*) Well, sometimes we move because our mom or dad gets a job in another city, state, or province. Sometimes we move to be closer to family or to a particular school. And sometimes we move because God calls our family to be missionaries in another country. Whatever we do or wherever we go, God calls each of us to be missionaries in our home, our neighborhood, our school, our playgrounds, and the stores where we shop.

That is what happened to our family several years ago when we lived in a small University and farming community. We were surrounded by acres and acres of rolling hills of wheat, lentils, peas, and garbanzo bean crops. Then, when our children were 6 & 8 years old, God called our family to move to Bangkok, Thailand. Bangkok is a huge city where more than 12 million people lived, which was very different than the small town of Pullman, Washington, USA. That was the biggest move we had ever made, and there would be oceans between our family and us.

Sometimes we wondered why we had to move because we liked where we lived and the friends we had, and we lived only a few hours' drive from grandpa and grandma and other family members. So, we talked to God about it, and told Him that He would have to help us figure out every detail and give us confirmation that He really wanted us to move. And you know what? He did! God gave us peace in our hearts, answered so many prayers, and sent family and friends to affirm our call to go to Thailand, and help us in practical ways, just when we needed it. We clung to Bible promises that assured us that God would be with us always! When we asked God why He wanted to send us so far away, we were reassured with His promise in Genesis 28:15, "Remember, I will be with you and protect you wherever you go, and I will bring you back to this land. I will not leave you until I have done all that I have promised you." When we felt scared about moving, we read Joshua 1:9, where God says, "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be frightened, and do not be dismayed, for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go." And Isaiah 41:10, where God says, "Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God; I will strengthen you, I will help you, I will uphold you with my righteous right hand."

Is moving easy? No, moving is never easy. But claiming God's promises and talking with Him and your family about your feelings really helps. Then, as you prepare to pack and move, here are some practical things you can do to help make moving a little easier.

- Get rid of things you don't need anymore. Donate items that can be a blessing to others or sell things for a special 13th Sabbath offering.
- Help your family pack boxes (*refer to the boxes surrounding you*), making sure to pack things that bring you joy and comfort (*have two or three items to pull out*). Then, when you unpack those special treasures in your new house, it will help you feel like you are home once again.
- In your bag or suitcase, (*open suitcase and pull-out special items*) pack a favorite toy, book, special blanket, and photo album of your friends and family, so you have it with you during your move.

- Write thank you cards to your teachers, neighbors, and friends. Take photos together and make plans to keep in touch and visit virtually.
- Learn about the place you will be moving to. Find out fun places to visit once you arrive, what the weather is like, what food is popular there and what language they speak.
- After you move, celebrate by planting a tree and see how big it grows during your time there.
- And remember to pray all along the way. Pray that God will bless you with new friends and neighbors and pray that you can bless them and share Jesus with them.

I'm sure you and your family can think of other things to add to this list. But just remember that when you are a follower of Jesus, you are in the palm of His strong and caring hand. And one day, you will be able to look back and see how Jesus led you every step of the way and why it was so important that you moved. When you are on the move with Jesus, you can be strong and courageous because the Lord promises in Matthew 28:20 that He is with you always, even to the very end of time.

WE WILL GO

BY KATIE MILLER

TEXT

“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the LORD your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you” (Deuteronomy 31:6, NIV).

God is looking for courageous families willing to go and share His love with a dying world. In 2016, God asked the Miller family to go and share His love far away from their family and friends. Moreover, He sent them to a place that would require all of them to be brave and courageous. God was asking for everyone in the family to be willing to share His love.

(Storyteller: Ask for three volunteers, preferably one around 4-6 years old, a 2-year-old, and a 5-year-old. The older girls can pretend to pass out food, while the younger child stay close to your side.)

Soon after they arrived, the older girls, who were 4 and 5 years old, helped give food to families who had fled their country because people were not kind to each other. One young lady was kept as a slave. During her captivity, she had a little girl; we will call Star*. Sweet Star was 2 years old when the Miller’s met her, and she was frightened of adults. When Mrs. Miller would smile gently at her, poor little Star would shake because she was afraid of adults. Mrs. Miller tried to play peek-a-boo (*demonstrate with the two-year-old*), but she would shake and hide her head. Mrs. Miller prayed, “kind Father in Heaven, please help this little girl to feel your love. Show us how to share your love.”

Katie Miller, MA currently homeschools her children and contract teaches for Middle East University in Beirut, Lebanon.

She felt impressed to call over her youngest daughter, Andrea, who was four years old at the time (*motion for the 4-6-year-old to come over*), “Andrea, you are four, and this is my new friend Star, she is anxious. Would you help Jesus? Would you go and share His love? maybe she will respond to you.” Andrea raced over to the little girl and asked if she could have a hug. Sweet Star, grabbed onto Andrea and gave her the biggest hug and smile. God wants to use the whole family to reach others.

(Storyteller: Ask for two girls and one boy to volunteer. Ask the boy to pretend to play soccer on the far left, two girls to be walking towards him. Tell the following story):

A few years later, the same family, still in the Middle East, was walking around the coast enjoying Daddy’s day off. The Mediterranean Sea to their west and the snowcapped Lebanese mountains towards their North. The mother and the father were chatting while pushing their youngest in the stroller while their oldest daughters, Angela & Andrea, were skipping and twirling around them.

Angela noticed a boy, Sam*, playing soccer by himself, and as he kicked the ball far from himself, she kicked the ball back to him. Soon Angela, Andrea, and Sam ended up kicking the ball back and forth for a couple of hours while Jared and Katie chatted with Seth* the boys’ father. (*Have the kids sit back down*) The family became friends and would do fun things together like going to the water park and taking walks near the sea. Angela and Andrea invited Adam to join Adventures. Also, Seth and Sam would join the family on church socials. That young boy’s dad eventually asked to begin Bible studies.

God wants to use boys and girls like you to go and share His love. Whatever you have, God wants to use. Raise their hands if you answer yes to the following questions:

- Do you have a smile? God will use that smile to share His love.
- Do you like to draw? God wants to use that skill to share His love.
- Do you like to be a good helper in the kitchen? God wants to use that skill to share His love.
- Do you have hands that can pull weeds? God wants to use those hands to pull weeds in your neighbors’ yard.
- Do you have hands to help make food boxes for those in need? God wants to feed hungry people with the food boxes you make.

God wants you to be willing to go and be His helper! Raise your hand if you are willing to Go with your family and share His love?

*Names have been changed

MIRACLE IN ZIMBABWE

BY TANYA MUGANDA

TEXT

“Oh Lord my God, I cried out to You, and You healed me.” Psalms 30:2

PROPS

Doctor’s thermometer, blanket, water, Bible

“Oh no, I’m not feeling well. I feel like I’m going to pass out!” I suddenly felt my body lose energy and couldn’t stand up. My body started feeling weak. I had enjoyed a fun weekend of playing with my friends in the neighborhood. At the time, I didn’t realize how bad things would get and how God would pull my family and I through this illness I had contracted.

I remember like it was yesterday. I was 9 years old, living in Harare, Zimbabwe, with my family that consisted of my parents and sisters. We had 3 dogs, a cat and a parrot. I was a very active child, always playing in the backyard, swimming in the pool during hot days, and attending pathfinders. During this time, there was a bacterium going around that would make people very sick for a long time. If someone contracted it, that person would be in bed for days, and recovery was not easy. Not a lot was known about this bacterium.

I had been playing with some friends, then a few days later I started feeling sick. At first my parents thought I just needed to rest, and I would feel better the next day. But the next day,

Tanya Muganda, MA CFM is the Administrative Assistant for the Department of Children’s Ministries at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists World Headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, USA.

it got worse. I couldn't eat and needed help to get out of bed. I wasn't able to go to school either, which was hard for me. My dad took me right away to the doctor's office, and I was told I had "Shigella." It was a bacterium that spreads fast and usually through contact, especially if a person hasn't washed their hands. As a 9-year-old child, I was so confused and had never heard of an illness like that. What was going to happen to me? Would I be the same? Was it a mistake to play with my friends, not knowing I would catch it?

The next few weeks were hard. As a young child, it can be tough to understand what is going on when you feel sick, and not much is helping. My parents were very concerned and took me back to the doctor. The doctor prescribed another antibiotic which is a medicine to help slow down the spread of the bacteria and help my body heal. It was many weeks of staying in bed and not knowing if I would ever be the same. I could hardly eat solid foods and relied on liquids most of the time. Even though my parents looked sad, they continued to pray over me every day. They put their trust in God that I would be fully healed from the bacteria.

I remember how my mom would make sure I ate something to help my body heal, and she continued to pray for God to give me strength. It was a scary time and the most challenging weeks of my childhood. Friends and relatives were worried that I would not survive, but they all kept praying for a miracle.

Slowly but surely, after one whole month, I gained my strength back. We all praised God for miraculously healing me. I was able to eat all my favorite foods again, go back to school and church. It's one of many miracles I will never forget. My parents showed their resilience through this tough time and kept holding on to God's promises.

Have you ever been so sick or felt all alone that you didn't know how you would make it? We live in a world where things don't always make sense. We are not immune from the bad things. In the Bible, Psalms 30:2 says, "Lord my God, I called to you for help, and you healed me." The good news is that God loves you so much that he will heal you and get you through whatever challenge you face. Aren't you excited to go to heaven one day where you won't get sick and have to stay in bed, but you will have new bodies celebrating and enjoying heaven? We are reminded that God hears our cries and prayers. He will also give us the strength to get through the troubles we face.

SEMINARS

— The *Seminars* are designed to be used during Adventist Family Ministries' emphasis weeks. Please read them thoroughly to get familiar with the content and vocabulary. To download a PowerPoint® presentation file visit: family.adventist.org/2022RB

THE RESILIENT MARRIAGE

BY WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

THE RESILIENT MARRIAGE: HOW TO STAY MARRIED FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE

TEXT

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

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE:

To explore key factors in building a strong marriage that will survive the inevitable transitions and traumas in marriage. The target audience is premarital couples, newlyweds, and couples at any stage of their marriage.

*****Note for reader and seminar facilitator:*** *This workshop is intended for couples in relatively healthy marriages. It is not for people who are in abusive or violent relationships, nor for those with serious addictions or long-term affairs. Such activities are not conducive to building healthy and strong marriages and impedes the ability of couples to engage with each other positively and honestly. In these instances, it is best to seek out professional counseling from a reputable Christian counselor.*

Willie Oliver, PhD, CFLE and **Elaine Oliver**, PhDc, LCPC, CFLE
are Directors of the Department of Family Ministries at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
World Headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, USA.

INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 pandemic has dramatically and drastically changed life in our homes. Marriage and family life are full of challenges. However, when unexpected events occur, additional layers are piled on top of regular stressors. Here's a veritable truism: couples can survive and thrive in their marriage despite the challenges that come their way. It is possible to build a resilient marriage and stay married for better, for worse.

So, what is a resilient marriage? First, let's define resilience. Resilience can be defined as having the emotional and social capacity to adjust and bounce back after exposure to traumatic events or exposure to considerable risk. Walsh (2015) defines it as more than just surviving or getting through a distressing ordeal, but rather the capacity to endure and recover from serious life challenges. It must go beyond survival because some people survive an ordeal, but remain interpersonally, psychologically, and spiritually impaired. They continue through life after adverse or traumatic experiences with debilitating post-traumatic stress, depression or anxiety and an inability to thrive. Hence a resilient marriage has flexibility, commitment, and a positive outlook.

In this seminar we will first explore how couples can adapt to changing seasons in marriage and identify principles that will help couples build a strong and resilient marriage. The seminar can be facilitated by a presenter or used by a couple in their home or with a small group.

ADAPTING TO THE CHANGING SEASONS

It is certain that marriage relationships will constantly change across the lifespan of a couple. Couples fluctuate between being loving and not so loving for various reasons—children enter the dyad, illnesses occur, employment transitions, financial struggles, depression, anxiety, infidelity, differing hobbies, and aging brings its own set of problems. Some changes we create ourselves and others are just a natural part of life on earth. Just like the seasons change in nature, couples go through various seasons in their marriage. How you respond to change is expressed through your attitudes, emotions, and actions. Couples must learn to regulate these three factors if they are going to weather the seasons of life successfully and maintain a high quality of marital satisfaction and stability in their marriage.

Change is inevitable. In the book, *We Need One Another*, D.H. Lawrence writes: "I should say the relation between any two decently married people changes profoundly every few years, often without their knowing anything about it; though every change causes pain, even if it brings a certain joy. The long course of marriage is a long event of perpetual change...It is like rivers flowing on, through new country, always unknown."

COUPLE EXERCISE:

Reflect on the quote above by D.H. Lawrence. In what ways were you prepared or unprepared for the changes you have experienced in your marriage? Consider personal changes, relational changes and unpredictable circumstances.

Attitude—what you think about your relationship and how your view your spouse will directly impact your relationship. Thoughts and attitudes trigger emotions; emotions produce behaviors or actions. So, if you think about your relationship and spouse in positive terms, your brain will trigger kind and warm emotions. Likewise, if you are going through a tough season, if you believe you can overcome it together as a couple, rather than blaming each other, you will have a greater chance of saving your marriage through the difficult season.

Emotions—our emotions were designed by God for a purpose. They prompt us to take action; this is especially helpful when you are in danger. It is important, however, to regulate your emotions as they can prompt you to act before you are able to think rationally. Often, when a couple has a fight, it is usually because one or both became flooded by emotions. Maybe a critical word or a contemptuous facial expression triggered them, and their emotions hijacked the center of judgement in the brain. The wires get crossed and a simple misunderstanding becomes a huge fight.

Everyone can learn to regulate emotions by becoming more aware of when they are triggered and how they react when they are triggered. An easy skill to learn is the PPC model: pause (breathe slowly for 10 seconds), pray (ask God to help you calm down and think rationally), and choose (a response that will strengthen the relationship and not tear it down).

Actions—attitude and emotions drive actions. However, actions can also drive attitude and emotions. Proverbs 15:1 says, “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” Have you ever quieted a screaming toddler by using a soft tone and a tender touch? If we are all honest, we would admit that when someone says or does something that is perceived as hurtful, it’s very difficult to respond with a soft answer. But if we are willing to go for a win-win for the relationship, one person can change the course of a conversation about to go awry. Actions can change attitudes and emotions.

COUPLE EXERCISE:

Reflect on this text and discuss how it could help your marriage build resilience:

“Therefore a man shall leave his father and his mother and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.” Genesis 2:24 (prompts: leaving mother and father, hold fast to wife, becoming one).

Think about the last disagreement you had with your spouse. Can you identify what emotions were triggered (anger, fear, surprise, disgust)? What actions followed? Take turns discussing with your spouse conflict cycles that are triggered by certain negative attitudes and emotions in your marriage. Commit to changing negative cycles, having a positive attitude, and regulating your emotions better to strengthen the resilience in your marriage. Remember, self-control is one of the fruits of the Spirit. (Galatians 5:22-23)

PRINCIPLES FOR STRENGTHENING RESILIENCE IN MARRIAGE

PRAY WITHOUT CEASING

Christians have the privilege of spiritual disciplines that strengthen and fortify believers. Christian couples can also benefit from employing these powerful disciplines to strengthen and grow their marriage. Prayer is power. Prayer changes things, but mostly prayer changes us. Prayer takes us outside of ourselves and reminds us that our reliance is on God and not ourselves. Paul reminds us: “Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God; and the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6, 7).¹

When couples (or even one spouse) commit to praying earnestly for their marriage, miracles happen, hearts and minds are transformed, marriages are fortified. Ellen White says: “When we come to ask mercy and blessing from God we should have a spirit of love and forgiveness in our own hearts.” (White, 1982, p. 97)

COUPLE EXERCISE:

Discuss how you can make prayer a regular part of your schedule. Put it in your schedule and commit to praying together daily at the scheduled time(s).

COMMUNICATE, CONNECT AND COMMUNE

“The deepest craving of every heart is to be laid bare, to be known, to be understood... If ever we take the time to know another life, we will be experienced as godly—as one ‘who cares’.” (Balswick & Balswick, 2006, p. 108) Communication is to marriage what petrol is to an automobile. Neither your marriage nor your car will be able to function without these.

The key to effective communication is emotional awareness, which we discussed earlier; learning how to express feelings effectively is the goal. It is helpful to learn how to use “I” statements instead of “you” statements, which helps the speaker to take responsibility for themselves and not blame the other person. For instance, a wife who feels angry towards her husband can say, “I feel angry when you do... and I would like you to...” You are acknowledging your feelings and making a specific request. The husband or listener paraphrases what has been said until the speaker feels that she has been heard and understood. The speaker should be careful not to monopolize the “floor” and allow the speaker to also share his point of view. This way of communicating seems very awkward but it is an effective way to clarify thoughts and feelings and keep emotions from escalating. In his book, *A Lasting Promise*, Scott Stanley (2013) emphasizes commitment, forgiveness and restoration as important elements of communication and connection.

The more you communicate with your spouse and share your feelings, hopes, dreams and desires, the more connected you will become as a couple. Taking time out every day to communicate,

connect and commune will help you build a strong foundation that will help your marriage stand strong when your faced with challenging times. Also, take time out to be warm and affectionate with each other, playful and cheerful. When you do this, you enter a sacred communion, a differentiated oneness, and create shared meaning in your marriage.

God desires that every couple experience a permanent one-flesh union. This will require humility, forgiveness, and personal sacrifice.

COUPLE EXERCISE:

Choose a non-conflict topic together, and practice speaking and listening to each other on the topic. Take turns being speaker and listener.

Commit to giving each other a six-second kiss and a 60-second hug daily.

Share daily compliments and appreciation for each other.

SOLVE YOUR SOLVABLE PROBLEMS

John Gottman (2015), in his book, “The Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work”, posits that 69% of the time couples argue about perpetual problems. He states that only 31% of the problems that couples discuss are solvable problems. The truth is much of the time, couples are arguing about things that are not really problems and that’s why they are not solvable. Gottman calls them gridlocked issues, where usually there are personality traits in their spouse that they are usually trying to change or there is a deep and meaningful need that has not been expressed.

When a problem is a perpetual problem, couples need to learn to dialogue about it rather than trying to solve it. Couples can use “I” statements to express their core belief or values on a specific topic, refraining from criticizing or blaming their partner and just stating their point of view on the topic. Each spouse should do their best to create a safe space for one another to share their feelings, dreams and needs, while communicating acceptance of partner. Couples who learn to resolve conflict with appropriate humor, respect and affection will strengthen resilience in their marriage.

TURN TOWARDS EACH OTHER INSTEAD OF AWAY

The natural human tendency when conflict occurs or when crisis come is to run away. The same is true of couples in marriage, if the conflict is with each other, you feel like turning away from each other (picture an angry couple sitting on the sofa, arms folded, each looking away from the other). Sometimes it’s a situation outside of your marriage that you feel you can’t share with your spouse, or you feel so overwhelmed with what’s happening, so you leave your spouse out and try to handle it on your own.

Always remember that you and your spouse are a team, and when problems arise, it’s best to confront them together as a team. As difficult as it may feel, push past the discomfort, the anger,

the hurt and turn towards your spouse. Together the two of you can turn towards God and allow him to calm your fears and get you back on course (Oliver & Oliver, 2015).

COUPLE EXERCISE:

Discuss as a couple how you can make a greater effort to turn towards each other in times of conflict and crisis. How can each of you be more intentional about making your marriage a safe place for bringing up problems and concerns.

CONCLUSION

After God created Adam and Eve, he gave them instruction for building and sustaining a life-long marriage (Genesis 2:24). If husband and wife “hold fast” to each other, and implement these simple principles into your marriage, you will be resilient and be well prepared to endure the storms of life together.

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RAISING RESILIENT CHILDREN

BY WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

TEXTS:

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Philippians 4:13, NKJV

“And He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.'” 2 Corinthians 12:9a

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

To explore key factors in fostering resilience in children. Target audience is parents of young children, adolescents, and children of any age, also anyone who wants to strengthen resilience in their own lives.

INTRODUCTION

Resilience has become the motto of the COVID-19 pandemic. While this word has long been associated with families, it has become ever-present during this pandemic era. In fact, due to the pandemic, every child in the world has now experienced at least one adverse childhood experience (ACE). It is during these traumatic and uncertain times that we crave the safety and security of strong family bonds. The truth is as we begin the parenting journey, it should begin with

Willie Oliver, PhD, CFLE and **Elaine Oliver**, PhDc, LCPC, CFLE
are Directors of the Department of Family Ministries at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
World Headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, USA.

an understanding that we have the responsibility to prepare our children not just for sunny days but for the storms that will inevitably arise in life.

So, what is resilience? Resilience can be defined as having the emotional and social capacity to adjust and bounce back after exposure to traumatic events or exposure to considerable risk. Walsh (2015) defines it as more than just surviving or getting through a distressing ordeal, but rather the capacity to endure and recover from serious life challenges. It must go beyond survival, because some people survive an ordeal, but remain interpersonally, psychologically, and spiritually impaired. They continue through life after adverse or traumatic experiences with debilitating post-traumatic stress, depression or anxiety, and an inability to thrive.

The good news is that God promises that we can learn to be resilient. In John 16:33: “These things I have spoken to you, that you may have peace. In the world you will have tribulation; but be of good cheer, I have overcome the world.” As believers and followers of Christ, we will have struggles in life, but we’re constantly reminded that God is in control. Resilience isn’t the absence of fear or challenges but the ability to persevere based on the truth that God is our ultimate source of strength.

This seminar will explore key factors in fostering resilience in children and provide some tips for parents in raising resilient children. Although this seminar takes a preventative approach, it can still benefit families going through a traumatic experience, such as the current pandemic.

MISUNDERSTANDING RESILIENCE

The concept of resilience originated in the field of physical sciences and referred to the capacity of an object to return to its original form after being stretched—such as an elastic band. Subsequently, the word started being used to describe individuals, families, and other items. The problem with this definition is that it often infers that it’s easy to bounce right back after facing difficult challenges. There may be an expectation that you can just move on with life after going through trials, especially in faith communities. The truth is that it is unrealistic to believe that one can just recover after experiencing serious trials.

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

Ask the audience to share ways in which resilience may be misunderstood. (Example: sometimes after a loved one dies, people may say “shouldn’t they have finished grieving by now”).

Resilience is not just speeding through a crisis and appearing untouched by a difficult or painful experience. It involves learning how to struggle well, experiencing suffering, courage, and hope simultaneously. This concept is summed up in 1 Corinthians 4: 8-9, ESV, “We are afflicted in every way,

but not crushed; perplexed, but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed.” Resilience acknowledges the impact of the trial while believing that there is a possibility of emotional well-being despite the challenges. Resilience can be seen as an outcome—emotional well-being despite the odds. Resilience is also a process—adaptability amid adversity.

RELATIONSHIPS NURTURE RESILIENCE

Many studies focused on resilience in children have pointed to the importance of strong family bonds. There are protective factors such as warmth, affection, healthy communication, reasonable structure and boundaries, emotional support, and authoritative parenting, which has a good balance of warmth and flexibility (not authoritarian – harsh and inflexible) that contribute to children’s resilience. Moreover, studies show that when children face adversity, if they have at least one caring relationship with an important adult who believes in them, they are able to gain strength to overcome hardships.

In the book, *Adventist Home*, Ellen G. White says, “Parents, let your children see that you love them and will do all in your power to make them happy...Rule your children with tenderness and compassion remembering that ‘their angels do always behold the face of My Father which is in heaven.’ If you desire the angels to do for your children the work given them of God, co-operate with them by doing your part...The spirit that prevails in the home will mold their characters; they will form habits and principles that will be a strong defense against temptation...” (AH 193.3,4).

When children feel loved and nurtured in their homes, they develop stronger characters and self-efficacy – a belief in one’s ability to succeed and accomplish tasks in life. If parents are going to foster resilience in their children, they must create a home environment that nurtures them and encourages their sense of competence, self-esteem, and self-worth. In essence, parents need to provide a strong foundation from which resilience can be built. Parents who are unable to provide this type of environment on their own can solicit the help of *trusted* family members, church friends, grandparents, and other extended family.

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

Think about your current home environment. If you were an inspector for home environments that pass the mark for fostering resilience in children, would your home pass the inspection? In what areas do you need to make changes to create the environment needed for resilience to thrive in your child or children?

PRINCIPLES AND GUIDELINES FOR STRENGTHENING FAMILY RESILIENCE

Every individual and every family will experience a traumatic, highly stressful, or disruptive event during their life span. As we mentioned earlier, due to the COVID-19 pandemic, every

child in the world has now had at least one adverse childhood experience. Stressful events are usually not predictable, but we can all expect that when these inevitable distressing events occur, they will interrupt normal family functioning. Parents play a key role in helping to build, foster, and strengthen resilience in their children so they can learn how to cope with life challenges when they occur. Children are not born resilient; it is a learned way of operating that can be taught and practiced throughout life.

BEGIN WITH THE END IN MIND

Jeremiah 29:11 says, “For I know the plans I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for evil, to give you a future and a hope.” This text reminds us that even though we may be going through trials, God knows what His purpose is towards us, and that is to restore us to peace and prosperity (wellness, wholeness). It is a reminder that while we are going through unexpected adversity, He has an expected end for a hopeful future (*Jeremiah*, 1909).

Parents must have a clear vision of what their family is about and how they are going to operate. When there is a clear vision of what type of family you want to have, it affects every decision you make and how you handle circumstances in the family. God has already stated the vision; we just need to capture it and run with it. This vision will directly impact how a family handles good times and challenging times.

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

Think about your family. List the members of your family (include extended family members who live in your household or frequently visit, such as grandparents, etc.). Write or draw what your home environment looks like now—happy, cheerful, sad, angry, adversarial, forgiving, etc. Then write or draw what you would like your home to look like (vision). What habits or attitudes would you like to change or remove from your home? What would you like to add to see your vision become a reality in your home?

BE INTENTIONAL IN FAMILY BONDING

We can't stress enough how important it is for your child to feel connected and bonded to their parents, to others and to God. Attachment studies have shown us that children who are emotionally connected in healthy ways are more secure. The more secure a child is, the more resourceful they are in dealing with the many demands of life. The securely attached or connected child believes he or she has sufficient inner resources, faith in God and others to handle life. When a child is insecurely attached, they don't feel they have the resources or support and is left to fend for themselves.

God created us to be in relationships, and research supports the biblical concept that relationships are crucial to life. From the time an infant is born, their brain is wired for basic functions such as thinking, feeling, relating to others, judging, and perceiving through the mother-child and father-child bonds. There is much evidence to suggest that an infant's very survival depends on this early bonding experience. Major studies that have shown that infants who were left without hugs and warmth/affection died for lack of connection. We should hasten to say that even a mother or father figure that provides the needed soothing nurture could help the infant to thrive.

When a child is securely attached, they experience what is called homeostasis. This means a child can physiologically and emotionally regulate their response, especially when they encounter turmoil in their environment. Parents can assist their children find stability at all ages by providing a home that is safe, predictable, and filled with much love and bonding. Just as God quiets his children with His love, we are called to do the same with our children.

DISCUSSION QUESTION:

Read Zephaniah 3:17 and list all the ways God attaches to us, his children. In what tangible ways can you be more intentional about rejoicing over your children to build closer bonds and nurture a secure attachment?

“The Lord your God is in your midst, a mighty one who will save; he will rejoice over you with gladness; he will quiet you by his love; he will exult over you with loud singing.” Zephaniah 3:17

MODEL RESILIENCY

My grandmother (Elaine) often shared stories of her young life and many of the hardships she encountered when she was a young girl. She was the oldest of 10 children, forced to drop out of school at age 13 after her father died to help her mother take care of her younger siblings. However, she always spoke about how God brought her through her trials. She often quoted scripture such as Philippians 4:13 and 1 Corinthians 12:9 and encouraged us to memorize God's promises to help us get through the challenging times in life. She lived her life believing that God would always make a way, even out of what might seem impossible. She modeled resilience.

Resilience doesn't mean you pretend or ignore the hardships or challenges in life. It means you remain positive and hopeful during difficult times. Here are a few ways that parents can model resilience.

1. ***Foster a positive attitude.*** Again, this is not fake positivity that doesn't allow for the processing of emotions, but one can look for the good despite the hardship.

2. **Learn to regulate your emotions.** People often misunderstand emotional regulation to mean don't express emotions. But it simply means you can learn to express your emotions in a healthy and proactive way. If parents model how to "self-regulate" then kids will learn as well.
3. **Remain hopeful.** Be optimistic about the future. As God's people, we have this hope that one day He will return and take us home with Him. Let your children hear you praying and reciting God's promises and reassure them that your trust is in God and that He can carry you through the storms.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Read the following texts: Philippians 4:13 and 1 Corinthians 12:9. Discuss what these texts mean to you and how they can help you become more resilient. Memorize these texts this week if you haven't already done so or select other texts that can help you build resilience in yourself and your children.

CONCLUSION

As Christians, we can turn to God for help with developing a greater capacity to respond to trauma and stress. Parents can help foster resilience in their children and remind them of the relief that comes with knowing that God has promised them hope and a future. If you are struggling to overcome hardship in life, don't hesitate to seek out Christian counseling.

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NURTURING CHARACTERS FOR ETERNITY

BY KAREN HOLFORD

NOTE

This seminar has an accompanying PowerPoint presentation with notes that you can use as you teach this topic. However, if you are working in a context where you cannot use PowerPoint, or you prefer not to use it, you can prepare a flip chart presentation using the key points from the following outline, or you could ask families or students to create a poster to illustrate each of the 24-character strengths discussed in the seminar.

INVOLVING THE GROUP, ESPECIALLY THE CHILDREN

Invite children to read the Bible verses connected with each character's strength – if possible, let them know in advance which verses you would like them to read. Each of the character strengths is also accompanied by questions to ask the group that you are teaching. It is helpful to invite the children to name Bible characters who showed the different character strengths to help engage their thinking about the different strengths and how they are illustrated in the lives of Bible characters.

OPTIONAL GROUP ACTIVITIES

Optional activities are also included under some of the character strengths, so that you can use them to break up the teaching with different activities that engage everyone in the audience.

***Optional illustrations** – an elastic band and a length of thread that you can break with your fingers (see Slide 42).*

Karen Holford, MSc, MA is the Director of the Department of Family Ministries at the Trans-European Division of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in St. Albans, Hertfordshire, United Kingdom.

NURTURING CHARACTERS FOR ETERNITY

INTRODUCTION

Together we will take a journey through character development in this seminar. We will explore why it is important and identify 24 of the main character strengths. We will also learn how we can nurture them in our children, in simple ways, every day. Let's pray before we begin.

Character strengths are positive ways of thinking, talking, and doing that energize us and help us to enjoy a more abundant life with better spiritual, mental and physical health and more fulfilling relationships. Character strengths are personal qualities that help us and our children to flourish, and we can choose to develop and grow our characters all throughout our lives. The good news is that we can nurture these traits in our children from a young age by the way that we interact with them daily, and by being a good model of character development in our own lives.

Jennifer Fox Eades, the Christian author of the book "Celebrating Strengths," suggests that our character strengths are the qualities that describe us at our very best.

This is encouraging for the children we nurture and us because it focuses on the times when things go well rather than the times when mistakes are made.

Usually, we focus on what we do when we are at our worst or who we are in the most difficult conditions, and we see our mistakes as our weaknesses. But focussing on what our children are capable of in the best conditions can give us a positive and encouraging perspective on their lives, as well as our own. It helps us to notice and nurture the character strengths that add quality and resilience to our lives.

PETER AND CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT

The Apostle Peter talks about the process of character development in his second letter. He doesn't expect Christians to have a fully grown and mature character from the start. It is grown, step by step, through maturity, discipleship, and everyday practice. The goal of these steps is to help us mature into the generous love of God. Peter writes:

"Make every effort to add to your faith, goodness; and to goodness, knowledge; and to knowledge, self-control; and to self-control, perseverance; and to perseverance, godliness; and to godliness, mutual affection; and to mutual affection, love. For if you possess these qualities in increasing measure, they will keep you from being ineffective and unproductive in your knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ." 2 Peter 1:5-8, NIV.

CHARACTER STRENGTHS ENRICH OUR LIVES

We need to develop our characters, as well as those of the children in our care, to help us become flourishing members of God's kingdom, and people who are a blessing to those around them. When our character qualities are strengthened and used, we become respected, hard-working, creative, resourceful, trustworthy, caring, and generous members of society. Ultimately the goal of

effective parenting and teaching is to develop children who will be good citizens, who are happy, confident, resilient, and caring. So, it is vital that we discover how to help children recognize their character strengths, develop these qualities, and enjoy using them.

ACTIVITY

God's character is our example. Let's work together to list some of the many beautiful characteristics of God. Work in pairs or small groups and create a list of God's character qualities.

Note: (If you are presenting using Zoom, consider sharing the White Board screen and enabling participants to use the text option in "Annotate" to create a list of God's character strengths.) Allow 5 minutes for the activity, then invite pairs/groups to contribute one strength at a time to a group list that you can write up on a flip chart.

WHAT CHARACTER STRENGTHS DO PEOPLE VALUE AROUND THE WORLD?

Research was undertaken to find the 24-character strengths that were most highly valued in every culture (see www.viacharacter.org). This list of strengths also describes God's character. It reminds us that we are all made in His image and that He has written His laws on the heart of every human being, whether they know Him or not.

The website, www.letitripple.org, has arranged the 24-character strengths valued in every culture into six categories: Wisdom, Courage, Humanity, Justice, Temperance, and Transcendence. We will explore these categories and character strengths individually.

Wisdom - Creativity, Curiosity, Love of learning, Perspective

Courage - Bravery, Perseverance, Honesty, Enthusiasm

Humanity - Love, Kindness, Social intelligence

Justice - Social responsibility, Teamwork, Fairness, Leadership

Temperance - Forgiveness, Humility, Prudence, Self-control

Transcendence - Appreciating beauty, Gratitude, Optimism, Humor, Spirituality

THE CHARACTER STRENGTHS OF WISDOM ARE:

- Creativity
- Curiosity
- The love of learning
- Perspective – being able to look at situations through a “big picture” lens

CREATIVITY

Creativity helps us to solve problems or imagine a design and bring it to reality. It is one of the most highly prized strengths because it leads to innovation and progress in important areas such as health, science, and caring for the environment. “For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do” (Eph. 2:10).

Which Bible characters had the gift of creativity? (God created the world, David wrote psalms, Mary used an animal feeding trough for a cradle, craftsmen were given the skills to build the tabernacle). How can we nurture children’s creativity? By letting them experiment with creative materials, provide construction toys, or natural materials, which they can use to build and make things, think of new ways to use familiar objects, use unexpected things to solve a problem when the usual tools are not available, cook food, create gardens, etc.

CURIOSITY

Curiosity leads to learning and the discovery of new possibilities. “It is the glory of God to conceal a matter; to search out a matter is the glory of kings.” (Prov. 25:2) Curiosity leads to learning and the discovery of new possibilities. Which Bible characters were curious? (Moses went to look at the burning bush, and Solomon wanted to learn more). How can we nurture our children’s curiosity? We can do this by providing resources and support them as they explore the natural world around them, find good books for them to read, move slowly with them and follow their interests and curiosities.

LOVE OF LEARNING

“Let the wise listen and add to their learning.” (Prov. 1:5) Who in the Bible loved to learn? (Solomon, Jesus, Paul, Joseph, son of Jacob, learned how to be a leader, etc.) How can we nurture our children’s love of learning? By sharing learning experiences with them, make learning fun, reward the effort of learning rather than perfect grades, etc.

PERSPECTIVE

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus.” (Phil 2:5) Which person in the Bible had perspective, and was able to see the bigger picture or to see things from a different angle? (Abraham, Moses, Caleb, Joshua, Job, etc.). How can we help our children to gain perspective? We can encourage them to see things from the perspective of different people, help them to see the Big Picture perspective of God’s love for everyone, etc.

THE CHARACTER STRENGTHS OF COURAGE ARE:

- Bravery
- Perseverance
- Honesty and
- Enthusiasm

BRAVERY

“Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged, for the LORD your God will be with you wherever you go” (Joshua 1:9). Which Bible characters were brave? (Noah, Moses, Daniel, Elijah, Paul, Mary the mother of Jesus, etc.). How do we nurture bravery in our children? We can help them to progress in small steps, making sure they can manage each step safely; teach them safety skills; don’t push them into scary situations if they are not ready; be ready to comfort and protect them if they do get scared “...Perfect love casts out fear.” (I John 4:18)

PERSEVERANCE

“My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be mature and complete, lacking nothing” (James 1:2-4). Which Bible characters persevered? (Noah, Moses, Daniel, Elijah, Paul, etc.). How do we nurture perseverance in our children? We can reward/appreciate effort rather than achievement to encourage them to persist; support them in hard tasks and practicing music, etc. by practicing or working with them; model perseverance in our own lives.

HONESTY

“Speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.” (Eph 4:15) Which Bible characters were honest? (Prophets spoke honestly to God’s people, David admitted his sin against Uriah, etc.). How do we nurture honesty in our children? By responding warmly and positively when they tell us the truth; show them grace and love so that they are not afraid to be honest with us, support them in putting things right when they have made a mistake, rather than learning how to cover it up, and being honest about our own mistakes and challenges.

ENTHUSIASM

“Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for human masters.” (Col. 3:23) Which Bible characters were enthusiastic? (Peter – jumping overboard, etc.). How do we nurture our child’s enthusiasm? By modeling enthusiasm, cheer them on when they are racing, maintain a positive attitude, etc.

THE CHARACTER STRENGTHS OF HUMANITY

These are the character strengths that involve caring for others are:

- Love
- Kindness
- Social intelligence

KINDNESS

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” (Eph. 4:32) Which Bible characters were kind? (Abraham, Abigail, Mary who anointed Jesus’ feet, the widow of Zarephath, Dorcas, Naaman’s maid, etc.). How do we nurture kindness in our children? We can show kindness to them – speaking and acting kindly towards them; encourage acts of kindness in the home; involve the whole family in acts of kindness and help children to experience the joy that being kind to others can bring; search for kindness ideas online; etc.

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY

Have children draw around an adult’s hand and then write on each of the fingers one act of kindness that they could do.

LOVE

“Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another.” (John 13:34) How did Jesus show love to others? He blessed them, touched them, fed them, cared for them, spent time with them, disciplesd them, healed them, spoke to them of God’s love, etc. How can we nurture the character strength of love in our children? By focusing on God’s love for us, so that we can pass it on to our children, give children a living example of God’s loving grace towards them, discover what helps them to feel loved and do it as often as possible, be good role models of loving followers of Jesus, surprise them regularly with different ways to express love to them, involve them in acts of love for others, etc.

SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE

Social intelligence is the ability to be aware of the needs of other people, and to meet those needs in kind and loving ways. “Be kind to one another, tender-hearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” (Eph 4:32) Which Bible characters were socially intelligent? (Abigail, Naomi, Abraham, Moses, etc.). How can we nurture social intelligence in our children? By encouraging them to wonder what other people might be thinking and feeling; encourage them to ask other people what they need and how they can help; teach them the skills to be good and kind friends, keeping secrets and treating others with respect and love, etc.

THE CHARACTER STRENGTHS OF JUSTICE ARE:

- Social responsibility
- Teamwork
- Fairness
- Leadership

SOCIAL RESPONSIBILITY

“Bear one another’s burdens, and so fulfil the law of Christ.” (Gal. 6:2) Which Bible characters showed social responsibility? (Jesus was concerned for the hungry, and worked to include those on the edge of society, such as women, Samaritans, aliens, children, lepers, tax collectors, etc. Abraham showed social responsibility in his relationships with those around him and for Sodom and Gomorrah, Moses also showed social responsibility as he spoke up for his people before Pharaoh, and lead and cared for the Israelites in the wilderness).

How socially responsible are we in our everyday lives? What are we doing to be a blessing to the society around us, to give those who are downtrodden a voice, and to work towards goals of social responsibility? How can we nurture social responsibility in our children? By keeping ourselves informed of social issues that we can be involved with, teach our children about these issues in appropriate ways, work together as a family on a project to raise money for wells and hygiene facilities in countries where they are needed, care for refugees, etc.

TEAMWORK

“Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brothers to dwell together in unity!” (Psalm 133:1) Who showed teamwork in the Bible? (Noah and his sons as they built the ark; the disciples feeding 5000 people; the people rebuilding the walls of Jerusalem; etc.). How do we help our children to be good team-players? By involving them in team activities, especially where they are working with other people on a mission or caring project rather than in competitive sports; being part of a choir, orchestra, or other group activity; doing chores together as a family, or preparing for an event together, such as a party, etc.

FAIRNESS

“My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism.” (James 2:1) Which Bible characters showed fairness? (King Solomon and the mothers with the baby, the new testament believers making sure that all the widows were treated fairly, etc.). How do we nurture fairness in our children? By treating them in ways that they consider fair; encourage good sportsmanship and being able to be a good loser; encourage them to treat those who lose kindly, and to share things with them, or do something to make them happy, etc.

LEADERSHIP

“But you are not to be like that. Instead, the greatest among you should be like the youngest, and the one who rules like the one who serves.” (Luke 22:26 NIV) Name some of the good leaders in the Bible. What are the qualities that God appreciates in His leaders? (Moses, Abraham, David, Elijah, Paul, Esther, etc. – humility, compassion, the ability to listen to others, having a growing relationship with God, courageous, kind, wise, etc.). How can we nurture these qualities in our children? We can give our children opportunities to lead out in small ways, such as family worship; nurture their character strengths; be good leaders as parents; read books about good leaders, etc.

THE CHARACTER STRENGTHS OF TEMPERANCE ARE:

- Forgiveness
- Humility
- Prudence
- Self-control

FORGIVENESS

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:32) What are some good examples of forgiveness in the Bible? (Esau and Jacob, the story of the prodigal son, Jesus and Zacchaeus and the woman caught in adultery, Jesus on the cross, forgiving his persecutors, etc.). How can we nurture a forgiving heart in our children? By teaching them a healthy process for forgiveness – listening to each other, showing that they have understand the effect of their actions on others, restoring broken relationships with appropriate and heartfelt apology and kind, restorative actions, etc.; reading good, age-appropriate books about forgiveness; watching short online videos about forgiveness from Christian websites; exploring resources for children and young people on forgiveness such as www.theforgivenessproject.com, etc.

HUMILITY

“For those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted.” (Matthew 23:12) Which Bible characters were humble? (Abigail, Moses, Jesus washing disciples’ feet, Joseph when he serves Potiphar and when he works in the prison, the lady that touched the hem of Jesus’ garment, etc.). How can we nurture positive humility in our children – so that they are secure in their value in God’s eyes, and are humble enough to serve others in love and joy? We can affirm their effort rather than outcome or ‘success’; let them know that God loves them just the way they are, and His love is not dependent on our ability, gifts, looks or behavior; encourage them to serve joyfully, seeing that everything they do, however simple, or lowly, is a gift for Jesus, etc.

WISDOM

“If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.” (James 1:5) Which characters in the Bible were wise? (Solomon, Moses, Joseph, Abigail, etc.). How can we encourage our children to develop wisdom? We can talk through possible scenarios and help them to understand how to make good choices, encourage them to ask their older relatives about the best wisdom they were ever given, affirm them when they make a wise choice, and read stories about wise people in the Bible and through the ages, etc.

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY

Think about an important piece of wisdom that someone has shared with you. What difference has it made to your life? What wisdom could you share with a younger person?

CAUTION

“Be very careful, then, how you live - not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil. Therefore, do not be foolish, but understand what the Lord’s will is.” (Eph 5:15-17) Which characters in the Bible were good examples of being cautious? (The prophets cautioned the people of Israel when their behavior led them away from God). How do we nurture wise caution in our children? By encouraging them to assess the possible risks in their actions, and to keep in mind their main goals in life so that they do not get side-tracked or derailed. Encourage them to act in ways that keep themselves, and others, safe. Invite them to come and tell you when they are concerned about something, or when they are confused about what to do.

SELF-CONTROL

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, forbearance, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control.” (Gal. 5:22-23) Which Bible characters were good examples of self-control? (John the Baptist, David when he refused to kill Saul, fasting, etc.). How do we nurture self-control in ourselves and in our children? By being a good example of self-control, encourage children to wait for what they want instead of needing to have it immediately, such as waiting a month before buying something that they want in order to see if they still really want it. Make waiting and self-control fun and a game, etc.

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY

Show the video *The Marshmallow Test* which is available to purchase for showing from www.ignitermedia.com https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QX_oy9614H

THE CHARACTER STRENGTHS IN THE TRANSCENDENCE CATEGORY ARE:

- Appreciation of beauty
- Gratitude
- Optimism
- Humour
- Spirituality

APPRECIATION OF BEAUTY

“The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.” (Psalm 19:1) How do we know that God appreciates beautiful things? (By looking at the beauty of so many things He has created). Which Bible characters were filled with wonder at the beauty of nature? (David and Job in their poetry). How can we help our children appreciate the beauty of the natural world and the value of using their creativity to create beautiful things? By encouraging them to pause, take a close look at nature, and truly take the time to wonder and praise God for what they discover; valuing creation ourselves; taking care of the environment; taking photos of beautiful things in nature.

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY

Ask people to share with a partner something God created that filled them with wonder in the past week.

GRATITUDE

“Give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God’s will for you in Christ Jesus.” (1 Thess. 5:18) Which Bible characters showed gratitude to God and to other people? (One of the ten lepers, David in his psalms, Mary who poured perfume over Jesus’ feet, Paul for his fellow Christians in many of his letters, etc.). How can we nurture gratitude in our children towards God and others? By offering thankful prayers, writing a thank you letter or card to God, writing thank you cards to other people for all kinds of things, going on a walk and looking for one thing after another to thank God for, showing appreciation each day to every person in your home for something that they have done that blessed you, etc.

OPTIONAL ACTIVITY

Encourage everyone to think of something they are grateful for that begins with the same initial as their first name. Ask them to share this with a partner. Set a challenge to think of thirty things they are thankful for each week, or to find one thing they are thankful for beginning with each letter of the alphabet.

HOPEFULNESS

“But those who hope in the LORD will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint.” (Isaiah 40:31) Which Bible characters were hopeful and optimistic? (Noah as he built the ark, John the Revelator, Simeon in the Temple who was looking for the baby Messiah, the leper who came to Jesus to ask for healing).

How do we nurture hopefulness in our children? Always have something happy for children to look forward to – the younger the child, the sooner the event, because it is hard for young children to understand the concept of time; involve children in planning happy events; involve children in saving up money to help others, or in collecting things to help others; encourage children to look forward to at least one thing in the next day or week, etc.

HUMOR

“A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones.” (Proverbs 17:22) Can you think of a story in the Bible that makes you smile or laugh? (Balaam’s donkey, Jonah and the Whale, Jesus blessing the children, Peter walking on the water.)

How can we help our children to have a good sense of humor? We can watch the funny antics of animals, tell good jokes together, laugh with each other and not at each other, look for funny videos to watch on YouTube, share the funniest moment in your day together, etc.

SPIRITUALITY

“And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.” (Micah 6:8) Which Bible character is your favorite spiritual hero, apart from Jesus? (Esther, Paul, Moses, Daniel, etc.) How can we nurture the spirituality of our children? By giving our children the most loving and gracious picture of God possible, be growing in our own relationship with Jesus, making family worship times fun and happy, offering children creative ways to pray, helping them to explore different ways to express their faith, etc.

WHY ARE CHARACTER STRENGTHS SO IMPORTANT?

- They give us valuable resources to help us cope with life’s challenges.
- We hear about the importance of helping children and adults develop resilience, but not much about what we can practically do to help them.
- Resilience is the ability to bounce back into shape after a challenging experience.
- It’s like being an elastic band (*show an elastic band*) rather than a piece of thin thread (*show how a piece of thread snaps easily*).
- We can stretch an elastic band a long way and it will quickly ping back into its original shape because it is resilient.
- Less resilient children and adults may find it difficult to recover from setbacks, hurts and challenges and may be more vulnerable to distress. They may also be more likely to use less healthy coping mechanisms, such as addictive behaviour, aggressive behaviour, giving up, bullying others, etc.

ACTIVITY

Ask the group for some quick answers: Which of the character strengths do you think would help a child to be resilient when they've done badly on a school test, or forgotten their lines for an important part of a school play, or when something very sad happens in their life?

WHAT ABOUT YOUR OWN CHARACTER STRENGTHS?

Have you ever thought about your own strengths, and what your strengths are?

ACTIVITY

List what you think are your top three-character strengths and think of specific examples of times when you used each strength. If this is difficult, think about the words that your best friend, spouse, loving parent or child would use to describe your character.

(Allow five minutes for this exercise – move to next slide so that they can be reminded of the list of character strengths.)

Here's a list of the main character strengths again, to remind you what they are. (Have the list available for the audience- see PowerPoint presentation).

- Creativity
- Curiosity
- Love of learning
- Perspective
- Bravery
- Perseverance
- Honesty
- Enthusiasm
- Love
- Kindness
- Social Intelligence
- Social responsibility
- Teamwork
- Fairness

- Leadership
- Forgiveness
- Humility/Modesty
- Prudence/caution
- Self-control
- Appreciating beauty
- Gratitude
- Hope/optimism
- Humor
- Spirituality

ACTIVITY

(As a presenter tell the story of a time when someone noticed one of your character strengths, as a child or adult, in a way that made a significant and positive difference to your life. Try to choose a story that shows how this positive experience is still contributing to your well-being and happiness today. If you are co-presenting, one person could also interview the other about their experience.)

- Reflect on a time when someone noticed and nurtured one of your character strengths, even in a small way.
- If you find this challenging, think about a time when you noticed someone else's character strength and reflect on that instead.
- Tell the story briefly to a partner or family member who is with you.
- Allow 5 minutes for the exercise and then invite feedback.

HOW TO NURTURE A CHILD'S CHARACTER REVIEW:

- Be aware of the 24 main character strengths so you can recognize them in your child and others.
- Let children know when you have seen them use a character strength. Affirm their strength as it will encourage them to repeat the positive behavior.
- Tell them that they made a good choice. Let them see how happy you are!
- Help children to recognise character strengths in themselves and others.
- Help them choose which character strengths they would like to work on.
- Wonder about the times when Jesus might have used this character strength and read the story together.
- Help them to make a list of ways that they could practice the strength
 - this will be different for each child as they have different gifts, personalities, preferences, etc.

- Think of the different Bible characters who showed that strength. Learn about them.
- Look for Bible verses about the strength. Learn the verses in creative ways. Write them out, act them out, make postcards of the verses, etc.
- Find autobiographies of inspiring people who used that character strength, especially people who are still living, or whose stories are recent – these stories show how character strengths are relevant to people’s lives today.
- Make a list of ways that you could practice a character strength as a family. You can all grow our characters at the same time, in different ways.
- Work on your strengths together as a family or a class.
- Design posters about the strength, and other creative reminders to help each other practice the strength.
- Notice when people show character strengths in real life, in books, in the news, on TV or in the movies. This is important as it helps to reinforce the concept that everybody can develop character strengths and they are important today and not just in Bible times. It also gives you and your children more ideas about how to practice the different character strengths in today’s world.
- At the end of each day invite your child to list 3-character strengths they have used during the day/week. Tell them which other strengths you have seen them use, too.
- If you are here with your children right now, tell each of them about a character strength you have seen them use in the past week. Watch their faces and notice how much this encourages them.

ACTIVITY

Divide the large group of attendees into smaller groups of about 4-5 people.

- Give each group a piece of paper with one of the character strengths written on it.
 - Ask them to list at least:
 - 3 Bible characters who showed this character strength.
 - 3 Bible verses about the character strength
 - 3 activities that would nurture this character strength in a child or teen
 - Any other resources that they could use or make to nurture the character strength
 - Invite groups to share their ideas. If you have many groups, invite a few to feedback and gather the ideas of the other groups to circulate to everyone later.
 - Demonstrate nurturing their character strengths of teamwork by encouraging and affirming them for what they have done together.
-

INSPIRATION

“Every act of life, however unimportant, has its influence in forming the character. A good character is more precious than worldly possessions, and the work of forming it is the noblest in which men can engage.” (Ellen G. White 4T 657, 1881)

MAKING TODAY PRACTICAL FOR TOMORROW

- Invite the participants to spend some time reflecting on today’s workshop, and making a few plans based on the ideas they have learned and thought about today.
- Invite them to share these ideas with a partner and encourage each other on their journey of character development.

PRAYER

- Pray for the participants, and the children in their spheres of influence.
- Pray that they will have a richer understanding of God’s character to inspire them as they grow their own characters and nurture those of their children.
- If appropriate and possible, gather the adults in a circle around the children, and pray for the children at the program.
- Pray a prayer of blessing on the adults as they nurture the characters of their children.

OPTIONAL HANDOUTS

Give participants a copy of the "Nurturing Children's Character Strengths" handout at the close of the seminar.

NURTURING CHILDREN'S CHARACTER STRENGTHS

The more character strengths a child develops, the more resilient, happy, and healthy he or she is likely to be, and the more they will become like Jesus.

There are 24 main character strengths that are valued in almost every culture. Here are some fun and creative ways to help children develop some of those important character strengths.

APPRECIATING BEAUTY AND EXPERIENCING WONDER enriches children's lives and helps them to notice the amazing things that God has created. Psalm 104. David.

- Look at a sunset, a shell, a flower, a picture in a book and ask children what they think is the most beautiful part of it.
- Tell each other the most beautiful thing you saw today.
- Visit art galleries or go for walks in nature and encourage children to slow down and notice beautiful things. Take a simple camera so they can photograph the things they discover.
- Send them on a 'wonder' hunt to find three amazing and natural things in the garden, the forest, or the park, etc.

CAUTION helps children to be safe and protects them from saying and doing things they'll regret later. Ephesians 5:15-17. Many of the prophets cautioned the people of God.

- Teach children important safety skills and how to look out for dangers when they're climbing, flying kites, playing near water, etc.
- Help children to think about different ways of responding to a situation. Encourage them to wonder about the different effects of what they might say and do on others, themselves, and the things around them.
- Use stories to help children think about the positive and negative effects of different characters' actions, and what the characters could have done differently if they had been more cautious and thoughtful.

COURAGE is facing up to difficult, challenging, or frightening situations instead of avoiding them. Joshua 1:9, Proverbs 3:5-6. Daniel, Elijah, Esther, David, Joshua.

- If children are fearful or shy, help them to think about the different things that make them feel afraid, to prepare for fearful experiences, and to find useful ways to manage their fears.
- Be there, with plenty of reassurance and support, when they're performing on the stage, at the dentist, or facing an exam, etc.
- Help children to remember their brave times. Make a simple bravery award and write their brave moments on it to encourage their courage in the future.

CREATIVITY isn't just about being artistic. Creativity is having an open mind about how things can be made and used, having a vision for an end product, and the determination to overcome the challenges of making it. Ecclesiastes 9:10. Creating the tabernacle, Mary using a manger for Jesus' bed.

- Choose an everyday object, such as a shoe, an empty jar, or a lonely sock, and think of at least ten interesting and practical ways it can be used.
- Let each child choose three fruity ingredients to invent a new kind of smoothie or try out different toppings on their pizza.
- Give each child a large cardboard box, some scissors and a set of chunky felt pens. Help them make their box into a spaceship, a house, or whatever their imagination suggests.

ENTHUSIASM is doing things with energy and excitement rather than complaining. Colossians 3:23. Rebekah watering the camels. The disciple Peter is also very enthusiastic.

- Be as enthusiastic as you can be – your enthusiasm is infectious!
- Create an enthusiastic greeting together – your own version of a 'high-five' – and use it to inspire enthusiasm when a child is reluctant to get going.
- Say: 'If we work together and tidy up this room within five minutes, we can all sit down together and have a special treat.' This encourages children to help each other get ready quickly and adds a sense of excitement.

FAIRNESS is treating all people equally regardless of their differences. James 2:1-5. Jesus, Peter, and his dream of the animals being lowered in a sheet.

- Teach children how to share generously and equally with others and how to include new and lonely people in their playground games.
- Encourage children to have friends with different abilities and cultural backgrounds.
- Show respect and thoughtfulness to everyone you meet.

FORGIVENESS is being able to forgive those who hurt you and knowing how to let go of your hurt and resentment. Ephesians 4:32. Joseph, son of Jacob.

- Help children understand forgiveness by finding symbolic acts to illustrate forgiveness, like washing dirt off a stone, or writing letters and tearing them up.
- Teach children that resentment fills them with sadness and pain and that letting go of resentments gives them extra space to feel happy again.
- Help children make amends by doing something kind for those they have hurt and those who have hurt them.

GRATITUDE is being thankful for gifts and blessings. 1 Thessalonians 5:18, Psalm 136:1. Paul is thankful in his letters, the leper who said thank you, Mary the mother of Jesus when she sings after the angel has told her she will have the Messiah.

- Say thank you prayers before meals.
- Give children diaries with a small space for each day. Ask children to think of three things they're thankful for each day and write them in the diary.
- Help children to make attractive thank-you cards. Encourage them to send thank you cards for the smallest gift or kindness.

HONESTY is telling the truth in love, even when it's hard, and being genuine and authentic. Ephesians 4:15. Elijah, Prophet Nathan, and King David.

- Respond warmly and lovingly when children are honest about the mistakes they have made – don't punish them for being truthful.
- Teach them how to tell the truth with love, sandwiching a sentence of thoughtful and considerate honesty between kind and encouraging words.
- Live honestly and transparently yourselves, without cheating or deceiving, so that you set a good example.

HOPEFULNESS is believing that the best things happen when you trust in God and when you work to achieve your goals. Jeremiah 29:11, Romans 8:28. Abraham.

- Help your children set goals for their day, week, month, and year, depending on their age. Show them how to break goals into smaller steps so they can measure their progress.
- Make a paper star or candle shape and fill it with inspiring messages and Bible verses to nurture their hope.

HUMOR is best when people laugh with each other and not at each other. Proverbs 17:22.

- Enjoy having fun with children.
- Tell each other the funniest thing you saw, heard, or did during the day.
- Go to a zoo and watch the funny antics of the animals.
- Look for the funny side of the things that happen.
- Do unusual, surprising, and funny things. Wear your clothes backwards for an hour; serve breakfast in the bath; arrange slices of fruit to make a funny face, and hide funny things in their bed or lunchbox. These little things make special memories that will bring a smile to their face.

KINDNESS is being thoughtful about what another person needs and then putting their needs before your own. Luke 6:35, Ephesians 4:32. Ruth, Abigail, Rebekah.

- Involve children in acts of kindness – bake a cake for someone, fill a basket with goodies for a sick person, pack a shoebox of essentials for an overseas child... Let them have fun choosing the gifts and experiencing the joy of giving.
- Make a kindness kit for children to take to school. Include a packet of fun tissues, plasters with smiley faces, a tasty cereal bar, a tiny fun toy, etc. Encourage them to share these with children who are hurt, sad, or hungry.

- Encourage children to notice others are tired, ill, or sad and find ways to be kind to their family, teachers, and friends.

LOVE is many of the other character strengths experienced within a caring relationship. Romans 12:9-21, 1 Corinthians 13, Jesus, The Good Samaritan, Ruth.

- Ask each person to draw a big heart and write inside it 10 things other people to help them feel especially loved. Look at what each person has written so you can find out more about how they like to be loved.
- Decorate hearts with Bible verses about love. Do loving things for each other in secret. Leave a heart-verse close to the loving action to let the person know they are loved.
- When you hear about the challenges in people's lives, ask yourselves how you could show them God's love, and then do it together.
- Imagine God's love is like a refreshing shower of water. Show children that our hurtful and unloving actions can be like an umbrella, preventing people from experiencing God's love. Show them a funnel and how it can collect lots of water and focus it into a bottle or glass. God wants us to be funnels, catching as much of his love as possible and pouring it into people's lives.

SELF-CONTROL is being able to wait for what you want and to limit what you take and eat, etc. Galatians 5:22-23. John the Baptist.

- Offer children the choice of a small treat now or a bigger treat later. Help them to think about the benefits of waiting for something better.
- Encourage children to take the smallest piece and offer treats to others first before taking for themselves.
- Don't always buy what children want straight away. Encourage them to wait a month to check if it's still what they really want.

SOCIABILITY/SOCIAL INTELLIGENCE is being aware of other people's feelings, as well as your own, and meeting other people's needs for comfort, encouragement, appreciation, help, respect, etc. Romans 12:9-21. Martha, Abigail.

- Sociability is being able to share in each other's feelings. Encourage children to be sad with those who are sad, and to be happy with those who are happy!
- When you read stories, talk about what they think the characters are feeling and needing and what children could do to be thoughtful and kind.

SPIRITUALITY is about believing that life has value, meaning and purpose. It includes helping children to learn about God and how to develop a positive relationship with Him. Micah 6:8. Many Bible characters.

- Read biographies of people who were motivated to do great things because of their faith in God.

- Use creative ways to help children pray.
- Tell children that they are a gift from God to the world, that He loves them, and that He has a special, exciting, and happy plan for their life.

TEAM-WORK is being able to cooperate with other people in happy and supportive ways. Ecclesiastes 4:9-12. Psalm 133:1 Noah and his family building the ark.

- Choose projects where children need to work together for the best results, such as putting up a tent, planning a birthday party, flying a kite, sailing a boat, etc.
- Model teamwork by working alongside children on challenging projects like tidying their bedroom.
- Give children plenty of opportunities to take part in team sports, music bands and group performances, etc., depending on their interests.

WISDOM helps children to make good choices. James 1:5; James 3:17; Ephesians 5:15-16. Solomon.

- Write out some wise Proverbs on plain cards. Take turns to choose a card and explain what it means.
- When you read stories, talk about the wisest people in the story and what they did and said that was so wise. Think about the foolish people too and learn from their silly mistakes!

PRACTICAL STEPS TO BUILD CHARACTER

It's one of the greatest privileges to watch children develop resilient character strengths that will help them flourish and be happy followers of Jesus.

- Know the different character strengths.
- Cut a heart out of a thin card and let your child write each of the character strengths on it. Add more character strengths if you like, as there are many more than the ones listed here. Also ask them which character strengths they think they showed during the day.
- Notice when a child exhibits one of the strengths.
- Name the strength they are using and let them know they have made a good choice.
- Help them to choose which character strength they would like to work on.
- Make a list of ways that they could practice the strength in their everyday lives.
- At bedtime, ask them what character strengths they worked on during the day. Tell them at least one other strength that you noticed that they may not have noticed. This is so affirming and powerful for your child.
- When you are busy – even noticing one character strength a week will usually be very encouraging for a child.
- Work on the strengths together as a family. Have a “kindness week,” etc.
- Use the list of strengths to inspire your family worship – focus on Bible characters who

used that strength, explore what might have helped them develop that strength, learn Bible verses about the strength, etc.

- Help children to notice when other people show character strengths. Look for people using character strengths in their books and in the movies/programs that they watch. Ask who was the kindest, bravest, wisest, person, etc., and talk about what they did, and what a difference it made to other people.
- For older children and teens, look for people today who are using different character strengths. Send them to research a person who is brave, or creative, or kind, etc. Or to find news stories about people using their character strengths.

RESOURCES

- www.letitripple.org – Jewish website filled with character-building ideas, including films, and materials to be used during Character Week
- “Celebrating Strengths”- Book by Jennifer Fox Eades
- Online quiz to identify your character strength, www.viacharacter.org
- 100 Kids Activities To Build Character. Moments a Day, Personal Growth for families <http://www.momentsaday.com/100-kids-activities-to-build-character/>

FAMILY RESILIENCE: BEING REFINED BY THE FIRE

BY ALINA BALTAZAR

TEXTS

“In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” I Peter 1:6-7 NKJV

“I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Philippians 4:13 NKJV

PURPOSE

The purpose of this seminar is to explore key processes in family resilience and how they can be applied to improve a family’s functioning.

POLE QUESTION

How many of you have heard of the term resilience? What do you believe it means?

Alina Baltazar, PhD, MSW, LMSW, CFLE is MSW Program Director & Associate Professor in the School of Social Work and Director for the Center of Prevention Education at the Institute for the Prevention of Addictions at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, USA.

INTRODUCTION

These days we are more aware than ever how the result of sin impacts us on individual, family, community, and world levels. You can live an exemplary life, following everything the Bible teaches, but still struggle with the results of sin, such as illness, natural and manmade disasters, unemployment, death, divorce, crime, war, and violence within your family or community. Though following God's commandments does decrease some of the world's pain, the devil loves nothing more than to cause harm to God's children.

Though the devil intends to hurt God by hurting us and turn us away from God's protection, God has the power to make something beautiful that can arise out of the ashes. This is where we get the phrase refined by the fire. Multiple Bible texts refer to the trouble humans face in a sinful world. Though many ask, "How could a loving God allow bad things to happen," once you get to know God and the freedom He gives us, you better understand why even Christians will struggle. Like gold, our faith is refined by the struggles we experience if we allow it to make a positive change in our lives. In those struggles, we often must completely depend on the Lord to get us through by providing comfort, sending us support in various forms, or addressing the problem itself.

In the field of the social sciences, we call this post-traumatic growth. This is the psychological benefit that we can experience as a result of going through adversity that can help us rise to a higher level of functioning. There was a father who had recently lost his 6-year-old daughter in a terrible accident. As part of his grief, he realized he hadn't been a good husband or father. His daughter's death motivated him to be a better man and father to his remaining children. He admitted it probably wouldn't have happened if he hadn't lost his daughter. This is what God can do for us as a result of life's tragedies.

WHAT IS RESILIENCE?

You may have observed that some individuals and families seem to not only survive but even thrive when faced with adversity. Researchers have made efforts to understand this phenomenon better. Some themes, however, have helped individuals and families be resilient even when dealing with multiple life struggles. This phenomenon has been called resilience, defined as "the ability to withstand and rebound from disruptive life challenges." (Walsh, 2003, p. 399)

Research has also identified limits to resilience. The more tragedies individuals and families face, the seriousness of the trauma, and the younger age that it occurs, the harder it is to be resilient to where the impact of trauma is limited. (Masten, 2013) That doesn't mean that what you will learn in this seminar won't help those who have experienced multiple traumas but realize improvement may be limited.

RESILIENCE IN THE CONTEXT OF RELATIONSHIPS

Those with good self-confidence are more likely to be resilient. Resilience begins in the context of relationships. It doesn't happen in a vacuum. Self-esteem isn't built on its own but within relationships with others. Though you may feel good about your performance, the only way you know it was done well is by feedback from others. You are more likely to care what others think when there is a connection with those individuals. After a traumatic experience, healing begins in the stability of a caring relationship. Our relationships with God, parents, siblings, friends, teachers, pastors, and mentors all contribute to who we become. Knowing there is someone in your life who is supportive and reliable is a big part of resilience.

Werner and colleagues' well-known study on resilience demonstrates the importance of relationships (1993). These researchers followed the lives of nearly 700 children of plantation workers on the Hawaiian island of Kauai. These children dealt with poverty and discrimination. One-third of this group had additional risk factors that included serious health problems, family alcoholism, violence, divorce, or mental illness. By the age of 18, 2/3 of those who were more at risk had not done well struggling with things such as early pregnancy, needing mental health services, or had gotten in trouble at school or with the law. This was expected.

The researchers wanted to better understand why 1/3 of these at-risk children had actually developed into being competent, caring, and confident young adults. When the researchers followed up with these individuals at the age of 40, all but two were still living successful lives. These individuals were even more successful than Kauai adults from less harsh backgrounds. This study found that some who had struggled as teens had actually turned their lives around. It was supportive relationships and religious involvement that was found to have the most significant impact on the resilience of these individuals. It is within the relationship where resilience begins.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

How many of you know someone who despite the odds against him/her still lived a healthy and successful life like the kids in Kauai? Raise your hand. What do you think made him/her resilient?

FAMILY STRESS, ADAPTATION, AND RESILIENCE

This seminar is building on what is known about individual resilience and extending it to family resilience. Stressful crises and chronic challenges do not just happen to an individual but also within the context of the family. What happens to one person impacts the whole family. By building on family strengths, families can emerge stronger and more

resourceful in meeting future challenges (Walsh, 2003). As mentioned earlier, a crisis can be a wake-up call to remind us of what is really important and to be more aware of changes that need to take place.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Have you or someone you know ever experienced a crisis where family relationships were strengthened? What do you think helped them do this? Discuss in smaller groups or with the larger group.

Now we will examine key processes in family resilience that have been identified by research. This section is adapted from Froma Walsh's chapter on Family Resilience in the 3rd edition of Normal Family Processes (2003).

FAMILY BELIEF SYSTEMS

Similar to the resilience that is connected to individual youth, religious involvement has many benefits to the family. A family's belief systems can have a powerful impact on how a family perceives a crisis. Adversity causes us to try and attach meaning to it. Shared beliefs can help family members make meaning of crisis situations, facilitate a more hopeful outlook, and offer spiritual connections throughout the process.

MAKING MEANING OF ADVERSITY

Though American society has a cultural tendency towards "rugged individualism" due to our pioneering past, most cultures around the world have a more communal approach. There are many benefits to this. Research has found that high-functioning families have a strong affiliation towards each other. They approach adversity as a shared challenge that can be faced as a family. When we work together to face problems, we are more likely to overcome them. The early Christian church functioned as a family unit giving strong support for one another.

Resilient families are more likely to see adversity as a normal part of life. As Christians, we know there is sin in this world, which helps us to understand why strife will inevitably happen even when you live an exemplary life. We all have different responses to life's challenges. When we can understand sin's role in the problems we face and react differently to these problems, it can help decrease blame.

Grief reactions are common. It is important to acknowledge the loss that may have occurred. It is not unusual to ask questions like: How could this happen? What can be done? As part of the grieving process, we may want to know more details about the tragedy. It can help fill in gaps to

allow for healing. Also, we want to know how to prevent something like that from happening again. Sometimes that is easier said than done. This is all part of the normal human response to adversity and can help us make sense of what happened.

POSITIVE OUTLOOK

One can't underestimate the importance of hope. The Christian faith is filled with messages of hope. Hope is as essential to our spirit as oxygen is to our lungs. No matter how bleak our current situation, there is hope for a better future. It is the lack of hope that often leads to people committing suicide.

Optimism is a close cousin to hope. It can be learned by focusing on little successes that happen along the way. Optimism doesn't fix our problems, but it can help us fight the tendency to give up. This helps us have a can-do spirit and see the potential within each family member and the family as a whole. Though a positive attitude doesn't change reality, it can help you accept what can't be changed. Which then will help you focus on what is still possible even within the current limitations.

SPIRITUALITY

Having transcendent beliefs helps us to see beyond ourselves and our current struggles. Most families find strength, comfort, and guidance in the midst of adversity through connections with religious traditions. Prayer is a way for us to connect immediately with our loving Father. Spending time in nature is another powerful way to commune with our creator God. Reading the Bible can help us develop understanding. Our communities of faith can also be an excellent resource for comfort and practical assistance.

A word of caution, adversity can cause a crisis of faith. It is important to keep in mind that failure to overcome adversity is not a sign of a lack of faith. We don't want to be like the people in Jesus' time who thought the blind man's parents must have committed some great sin that caused the blindness (see John 9:1-2) or like Job's friends who pushed him to repent when he knew he didn't do anything wrong to deserve his losses.

Many individuals wonder, "How could a loving God allow this terrible thing to happen. Why isn't he answering my prayers!" God is often silent in times of distress, choosing instead to answer our prayers differently than we desire. This can be difficult to accept. When we are depressed, we often feel disconnected from God, right when we need him the most. This is when Godly friends and family are so important. They can offer support and encouragement to represent God's loving care in ways we can't feel in our distressed state.

FAMILY ORGANIZATIONAL PATTERNS

Families come in all shapes and sizes, especially these days. One out of four children in the U.S. are growing up without a father (U.S. Census Bureau, 2020). This isn't just

happening in the U.S. but around the world. Research has found that family flexibility and stability, connectedness, and various resources are beneficial to resiliency, improving outcomes for all family forms.

FLEXIBILITY AND STABILITY

Some families are naturally more flexible than others. There are benefits to clear roles and boundaries, but families often can't return to the normal life they knew in the aftermath of a major change. They will need to adapt. When there is parental disability or divorce, families must construct a new normal. At the same time, families still need to maintain or restore a sense of stability as soon as possible.

Firm yet flexible is the way to go in parenting children during these life transitions. During stressful times, children need to know that their parents and other caregivers will be able to provide nurturance, protection, and guidance. It is during periods of struggle that children most need security and predictability.

CONNECTEDNESS

A crisis has the potential to shatter family cohesion, but this is the time when families need to turn to one another for mutual support. One way to do this is to respect the different ways each will respond to the struggle. Some may need to be alone, spend time with friends outside of the family, and/or take a longer or shorter time to heal than others would expect. We all grieve differently.

Complete family cohesion may not always be possible. It helps to have workable coalitions – especially among the parents. These connections can then bring about more family connectedness. With the loss of a parent through divorce, abandonment, or death, the child needs to find a way to connect through pictures and stories. In addition, children need reassurance that he/she will not lose other family members.

SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC RESOURCES

Though we have spent a lot of time focusing on the resiliency of immediate families, they should not expect to do it all on their own. Extended family and other social networks can be an invaluable resource during a crisis. Blood is thicker than water is where we get the phrase that explains the close bonds families can have with each other through thick and thin.

Unfortunately, extended family isn't always available. Thus, social networks of churches and community organizations can help to fill the gap. Financial resources can be difficult to come by and a challenge to access. Support systems can help families access these resources. All these resources provide practical assistance, but also be a source of emotional support and role models for children whose parents are more preoccupied.

COMMUNICATION

Think about a time you were in a crisis and how important communication was. In some situations, what we say can make a difference between life and death. This is when clear communication is absolutely essential not only to share vital information that is necessary to survive, and problem solve but also to maintain relationships.

CLARITY

When under stress, it can become more challenging to communicate clearly. We can misunderstand and make assumptions since there is often less time for clarification. Sometimes communication is intentionally limited due to concerns of how it may harm children or frail older relatives. This can lead loved ones to fill in the blank with incorrect information that can cause more distress or conflict. If you struggle with communicating on certain difficult topics, there are age-appropriate books available to rent or purchase. Doctors and counselors are also a good resource for suggestions.

COLLABORATIVE PROBLEM SOLVING

Instead of attacking one another, resilient families work together to resolve problems. The more people involved in brainstorming solutions, the better, but it isn't easy finding a solution everyone will agree upon. You may have to compromise, but you should also know what you aren't willing to compromise. Problem-solving is a learning process. Once a solution doesn't seem to work, try to see it as a chance to learn so you can come up with an even better solution.

Focus on what matters for your family. Decide on clear goals, take concrete steps, and build on your successes. Ideally, your family will take a more proactive stance and figure out ways to prevent problems, thus preparing for the future.

OPEN EMOTIONAL EXPRESSION

Open communication supported by a climate of mutual trust, empathy, and tolerance for differences, enables family members to share the range of feelings that may come as a response to a crisis or chronic stress. When a family feels comfortable sharing, they can avoid the repression of emotion, controlling behaviors, and behavioral issues in children.

There can be gender differences in how men and women communicate. Men are more likely to withdraw or get angry. Women are more likely to reach out to others for support and become more emotional or sad. Men may feel they have to stay strong and can't show emotion. This can lead to health problems or turning to unhealthy ways of coping. Women may resent a husband's withdrawal then pursue him even harder, leading to an angry response. When emotions can't be shared between couples, it can lead to divorce. It is important to share emotions and find comfort in one another.

The best way to express your concerns or desires is through assertive communication. It is a way to state your need and also decreases the possibility of a defensive response by the other party. A great way to do this is by following this script: "I feel _____ (state an actual emotion, not an opinion) when/about _____ (describe the situation in an external way, avoid using the word 'you'). The reason

this upsets me is _____. What I need from you is _____.” Here is an example, “I feel unloved when I share my concerns about my job and am told I have to keep working. This upsets me because I believe my job is possibly harming my health. I worried I won’t be able to continue to provide and care for my family if my health is compromised. What I need from you is to support my search for another job and be willing to make some sacrifices if the new job pays less.”

There are a few reasons why this communication approach works so well. When we use “I messages” we are making the issue about us, not the other person. Sharing our emotions can help draw out empathy from the other person. Explaining why the situation is upsetting can increase understanding. Then the conversation moves to problem-solving. Ideally, the listener will ask clarification questions in a non-defensive manner then summarize what has been heard. The original speaker needs to be willing to compromise with the other person in order to fill the perceived need. At first, this type of communication may not feel natural, but you will find a style that will work best for you with practice. For more communication tips between couples, see The Gottman Institute website, www.gottman.com

APPLICATION QUESTION

Now it is time to practice assertive communication. Find a partner you know well, if possible. Think of something you would like to say in an assertive way. It could be a real or a made-up scenario. Follow the script in this seminar. If there isn’t anyone you would feel comfortable partnering with, write down what you could say following the same script. Remember to avoid saying, “I feel that...” It can lead to the other person feeling attacked, and you may get a defensive response. Name an actual emotion. See the Emotions Wheel to help you out. When done, discuss if you thought this style of communication was helpful.

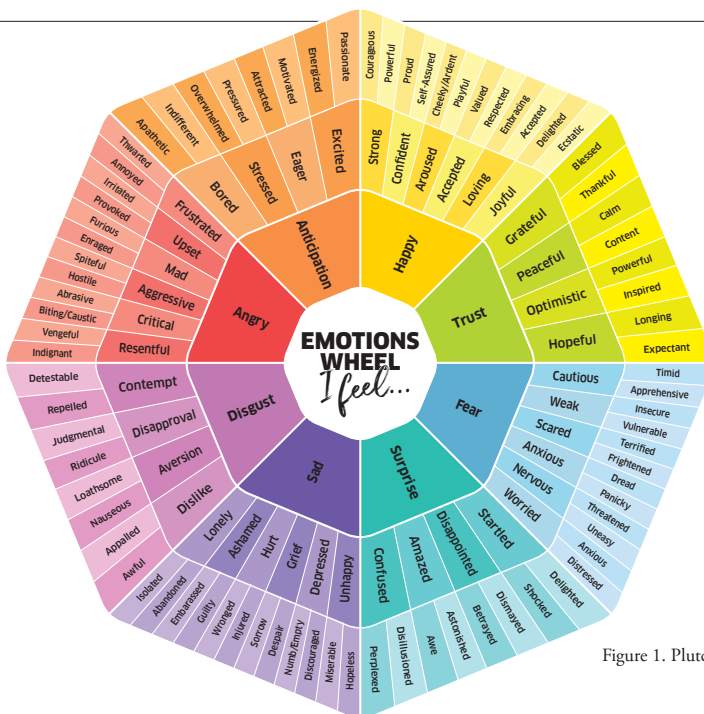


Figure 1. Plutchik’s wheel of emotions, 1980.

IS YOUR FAMILY RESILIENT?

Take the Walsh Family Resilience Questionnaire to see where your family is at being resilient. Ask yourself, how does my family deal with crises and ongoing challenges.

| I. Belief Systems | Rarely/never | | | Almost Always | |
|--|---------------------|---|---|----------------------|---|
| 1. Family faces distress as a team | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. Distress is common and understandable | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. Shared effort in managing challenge | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Try and make sense of stress | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. Maintain hopefulness | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Encouraging toward each other | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Maintain persistence | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. Have an accepting attitude | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. Share important values | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. Use spirituality | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. Challenge inspires creativity | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. Display compassion | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. Learn from challenges | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Section Total: /65 | | | | | |

| II. Organization Patterns | Rarely/never | | | Almost Always | |
|--|---------------------|---|---|----------------------|---|
| 14. Flexible when adapting to stress | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. Stable and reliable home environment | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. Parental leadership present | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. Reliance on family members | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. Respect for individual needs | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. Role models are present | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. Reliance on peers and the community | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21. Financial stability is present | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 22. Community resources are present | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Section Total: /45 | | | | | |

| III: Communication/Problem-solving | Rarely/never | | | Almost Always | |
|---|---------------------|---|---|----------------------|---|
| 23. Family members clarify information | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 24. Family is clear and consistent in actions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 25. Family members can express opinions | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 26. Family can share difficult feelings | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 27. Share positive feelings | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 28. Family members display understanding | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 29. Family collaborates in decision making | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 30. Goal setting is used | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 31. Family learns from mistakes | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 32. Family plans for the future | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| Section Total: /50 | | | | | |

Total: /160

CONCLUSION

With widespread concern for the breakdown of the family, it is helpful to think of resilience to help strengthen families in all their forms and address their unique struggles. Instead of focusing on problems, we want to focus on how families can succeed despite the barriers they face. This seminar introduced the topic of resilience, limits to resilience, ways families can be resilient with spiritual implications throughout, and the resiliency levels within your family. You can apply what was learned in this seminar to your own family or make a difference in the families struggling around you. Remember, “I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me.” Philippians 4:13 NKJV

APPLICATION QUESTION

Now that you know your family’s resilience levels, what do you think you can do to help your family or the families you know struggling to be more resilient? Name one thing you can do this week and in the near future that you can commit to.

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GROWING CONFIDENT GIRLS

BY TAMYRA HORST

TEXTS

“For you formed my inward parts; You covered me in my mother’s womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made; and that my soul knows very well. My frame was not hidden from You, when I was made in secret, and skillfully wrought in the lowest parts of the earth. Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them.” Psalm 139:13-16

“The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy.” John 10:10

“Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour.” 1 Peter 5:8

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all liberally and without reproach, and it will be given to him.” James 1:5

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

To equip parents, grandparents and church leaders to encourage, equip, and challenge girls to live confidently as the beautiful and unique young women God created them to be—boldly living out His plan and purpose for their lives.

INTRODUCTION

She burst into the room wearing a princess dress. “Look at me; I’m a princess!” she declared with joy as she twirled and danced. She soon disappeared and then reappeared in a different princess dress but with the same exuberance and joy. The innocent little girl was sure that everyone in the room loved her and would delight in and celebrate her.

Today that same little girl is thirteen, and her perspective of herself is changing. Instead of twirling, she changes outfits several times because nothing looks right. No longer declaring she’s a princess, she’s focused on what isn’t right about herself and her appearance. Like most girls her age, she’s a complex mix of emotions and thoughts—sometimes jumping from one to another without any warning on unsuspecting parents.

TRANSITIONING FROM PRINCESSES TO TEENS

The transition from little girl to teen is hard. And it impacts girls physically (think hormones, body-changing), emotionally, socially (friendships, peer pressure), and mentally. Their bodies are changing, and hormones are wreaking havoc on their emotions and thoughts. Suddenly our little princesses are no longer sure that anyone—let alone everyone—loves her, delights in her, and wants to celebrate her. She’s not even sure she likes herself.

Girls feel the need to be perfect and do everything—and do it all well:

- fit in while also standing out
- take advanced placement classes
- take college credit courses while in high school
- participate in sports, music, and a host of other extra-curricular activities
- be thin, pretty, and wear the right clothes/makeup
- have lots of friends

Their schedules are packed, but they’re afraid that they’re not doing enough.

Social media adds a new level to the pressure— even when girls know that many “perfect” pictures have filters on them. “Then you think you should look that way with filters too,” a seventeen-year-old girl recently shared as she talked about the battles and pressures that she and her friends face daily. Suddenly, who you are isn’t enough. There’s pressure to grow up and be perfect, look perfect, and do everything not only well but excel. It’s no wonder that anxiety and depression are at an all-time high and growing, especially among teen girls. (Davis, 2019)

Ypulse, a polling firm that focuses on Generation Z and millennials, surveyed more than thirteen hundred girls, ages eight to eighteen, on the topic of confidence. The results were dramatic.

- There was a 30 percent drop in confidence during puberty.
- The number of girls who said they were not allowed to fail rose from 18 percent to 45 percent from the ages of twelve to thirteen (that's a 27 percent increase in just one year!)
- Girls under twelve shared that they "make friends really easily. [They] ...can go up to anyone and start a conversation." By the age of fourteen, they reported, "I feel like everybody is so smart and pretty and I'm just this ugly girl without friends." (Kay, 2018)

Many girls do not believe they are good enough. One report states, "7 in 10 girls believe they are not good enough or do not measure up in some way, including their looks, performance in school and relationships with family and friends." (Fund, 2014)

This lack of confidence causes girls to avoid taking risks or trying new things and keeps them from believing that God has a plan for their lives. They do not believe that who they are and what they are good at are acceptable. They often try to please everyone around them (parents, teachers, friends, boys) expecting perfection from themselves. And no matter how hard those who love them try to encourage them and tell them they're still princesses, these girls no longer believe it.

Feeling like they're not good enough often causes girls to focus on negative feelings and thoughts. As a result, their brains become hardwired to think negatively. Each thought creates a path in the brain. The more we think that thought, the stronger the path. For instance, you look in the mirror and think, *I'm fat*. A path is created. The next time you look in a mirror, your brain remembers and thinks, *I'm fat*. You accept that thought, and the path deepens. Soon every time you look in the mirror, you see someone who is fat without even thinking about it— no matter what you really look like. (How many of us have looked back at pictures of ourselves when we were younger and thought we were fat only to realize we weren't?) The path becomes a deep rut in your thinking. It becomes the truth of who we are in our minds: "I'm not good enough."

This is the foundation teen girls are building on as they transition from girl-to-teen-to-adult. They battle with confidence and self-esteem and do not see their God-given uniqueness as a good thing, nor appreciate their specific gifts or abilities.

DOWNPLAYING AND DISMISSING

Peggy Orenstein, author of *Schoolgirls: Young Women, Self Esteem and the Confidence Gap*, found that middle school girls repeatedly dismissed their academic triumphs but willingly embraced their failures. (Murray, 2006)

Ask a girl (or adult) to make a list of what they are good at and like about themselves, and they will struggle, hesitate, doubt themselves. But they can easily make a list of what they're not

good at or list their failures. Girls (and adults) tend to downplay their strengths and successes and focus on their perceived weaknesses and failures.

EXERCISE

Let's test this out. Take a sheet of paper and create two columns. For one minute, we're going to list the things we're good and like about ourselves in the first column. Go. (Give them one minute.)

Now for the next minute, we're going to list the things we're not good at or don't like about ourselves in the second column. Go. (Give them one minute.)

Look at both columns. Which one has the longer list? Which one was easier to create?

They also tend to diminish their strengths and successes—as if they really aren't a big deal. People compliment them, and they diminish it or disregard it.

For instance, someone says, "You did a great job with that school project!" Girls may respond with things they could've done better or differently. Or point out the flaws in the project.

Someone compliments an outfit or hairstyle, and they say, "This old thing?" or "I don't really like it." Or "It's not as nice as Kaleigh's."

At the same time, they hear people's critical words, think about them, repeat them over and over again in their heads, and accept them as the truth about who they are. But then dismiss words of affirmation with barely a thought.

MORE THAN JUST HORMONES

Hormones and body changes are just one part of what's happening in the hearts and minds of girls. We have an enemy. The Bible is clear.

- "The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy." John 10:10
- "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour." 1 Peter 5:8

Each of us, including our teen girls, has an enemy out to steal, kill, destroy, and devour. He does not want girls living confidently in the value and unique abilities God gave them. He doesn't want them to believe they are who God says they are. And he also wants to take out their trust and faith in God.

The enemy will use messages girls hear through words spoken to them, messages from social media, their interpretation of words, and situations. This will cause them to believe that they aren't enough, and don't have what it takes. He will do all he can to damage their relationships—with parents, friends, teachers, etc. And sadly, most of the time, we don't even recognize that it's the enemy. Girls will believe the things they hear as the truth about themselves instead of recognizing the lies and going to God's truth instead.

The teen years are a crazy mix of hormones, growing pains and transitions. The enemy is using everything to cause girls to doubt themselves, even feel shame about who they are, their appearance, their abilities (or their considered lack of abilities). Instead of just feeling like they've failed or disappointed others, they will think they ARE a failure or disappointment.

WHAT CAN WE DO?

So, what can parents, grandparents, youth leaders, Sabbath School teachers, and other caring adults do for the girls in our lives?

PRAY LIKE CRAZY

One of the most important and powerful things you can do is pray for her. Regularly. Every time she comes to your mind.

- Pray that God will reveal Himself and His love in undeniable ways to her
- Ask for the outpouring of the Holy Spirit in her life and that He would have all power to speak, encourage, convict, and guide her
- Pray for the promised wisdom of James 1:5 for yourself as you love and disciple her, and for her—that she will be able to discern the enemy's lies and God's truth
- Ask God to bring her godly friends who can encourage her and affirm her—build her up instead of tear her down
- Pray that God would give His angels power to protect her—not just from physical harm, but emotional, mental and spiritual wounds as well
- Ask God to give you confidence—not just to encourage and mentor her, but confidence that you can live out in your own life as an example

Pray with her. Let her hear you praying for her and all the beautiful things you're asking God to do in and through her. Let her hear you thanking God for her and for specific qualities and characteristics. There is something powerful and life-impacting about hearing another person pray for you.

MODEL

You compliment her. Cheer her on. Tell her she's doing great and is beautiful, but your daughter still puts herself down and beats herself up. What gives?

She may be learning how to talk about herself from you and others—but not from your affirmation and encouragement. How you talk about yourself is her example of how women see themselves. Be careful how you talk about yourself. Your daughter is learning how to talk and think about herself, not just from the things you say about her, but by how you talk about yourself.

We need to learn to talk good about ourselves. Stop trash-talking ourselves. The trash talk becomes so ingrained in our minds that it's what we naturally think about ourselves. We can change that by talking good about ourselves to ourselves. Be a friend to ourselves. We wouldn't talk to our friends like we talk to ourselves. So, pretend you're your own friend. What would you tell you?

Model the courage to try new things. Do things you're not good at, and show her how to handle failure, by failing and not beating yourself up—instead, learning from the experience and trying again. Teach her what it is to have friends and work through the hard in relationships. Show her how to depend on God by living it out—letting her see and hear when you pray, how you use scripture to encourage yourself, and having godly friends who pray with you and for you.

There may be areas where you, too, need to grow. Do the work. Let her see you putting in the effort to learn to talk about yourself in a positive way and being grateful for the gifts God has given you, instead of comparing yourself to someone else and feeling less than.

HELP GIRLS LEARN TO “YOU DO YOU”

While at the High School for the Performing Arts in New York City, Jennifer Anniston was performing a highly dramatic scene from *The Three Sisters* and could hear the audience laughing. She walked off stage wondering why they were laughing when it was supposed to be drama.

Her acting teacher later told her, “Jennifer, they're laughing because you're funny.”

She responded, “But I don't want to be a funny actress. I want to be a serious actress.”

“No, you've got it wrong,” he said. “This is a wonderful thing.”

Jennifer realized that she had a natural tendency to make people laugh. She was good at making people laugh. She had never seen it as a strength or something to pursue—it was too easy.

She shares, “I realized I had to accept this aspect of my personality—my natural tendency to make people laugh—but place it in a larger context of what I wanted to achieve... So instead of rejecting the funny side of myself, I embraced it. And channeled it into something I love to do, and that makes me unbelievably happy and, amazingly, makes other people happy, too.” (Others, 2002)

Help girls learn that God created each of us with unique abilities and characteristics on purpose, intentionally designing them for ways to impact the world around them like no one else can. Then guide them in discovering their abilities and strengths, seeing the possibilities of how they can use those to make a difference. We can do this by affirming the abilities, strengths and characteristics we see in them and by coaching them to identify these themselves.

EXERCISE

Let's do a simple coaching activity designed to help girls identify their strengths. This is an example of something you can do with girls—either individually or in a group setting like Sabbath School or a youth group. We'll try it ourselves. (Have everyone participate!)

What are you good at? What are your strengths? What have you been successful in doing? Have participants make a list of their strengths. Challenge them to see how many they can list in five minutes. (Give the group five minutes to make a list. Then invite people to share one or two things with the group).

Sometimes, identifying where we've been successful can also help identify our strengths and abilities, so take a moment to list three things you've recently successfully accomplished. What are three things you've wanted to do and were able to accomplish? Things you did that turned out well? (Allow time for people to make a list and again invite people to share a success or two).

So what strengths or abilities enabled you to be successful in this? (Brainstorm with the group all possibilities of strengths that might be needed to be successful for this result. Then encourage the participant who shared to consider if any of these are their strengths).

DO WHAT YOU LOVE

One more way to help girls discover who they are and live confidently as the beautiful person God created them to be is to encourage and support her to get involved in things she enjoys, and encouraging her to try new things. Try “on” different things to see if they “fit.” For example, take an art class, try a new sport, or try something she's never done before and see if she likes it and can learn to do it well. Being bold and trying new things sometimes opens up new possibilities.

Ask her, “If you had more confidence, what is one thing you would do or try?” Then coach her through the steps she can take towards accomplishing that goal. Challenge her to schedule a date to take that step and begin living boldly.

EXERCISE

Let's try it out. What's one thing you would do or try if you had more confidence or thought you couldn't fail? (Go around the room and let people share).

Now let's take five minutes to think of three steps you could take towards actually trying what you just shared. What would the first step need to be? Second step? Third step? (Give them time to work on three steps).

When can you take that first step? Schedule it. Let's make this real so that you'll have an experience to share with girls. Give them one to two minutes to schedule their first step.

ENCOURAGE HER AND BUILD HER UP

Compliment and affirm her in areas other than just appearance. What is she good at? What are the characteristics that you can affirm? Where have you seen her go above and beyond? Be kind to someone? Tell her about it.

Also, affirm her effort and not just accomplishments and performance. Girls today report that they feel the need to do everything perfectly. Let's take the focus off the results and move it onto the effort that's gone into what she's doing.

When girls struggle and express their doubts and discouragement, we may think we're helping by saying things like, "It's not so bad." Or "You just need to try harder." Instead, we need to acknowledge their feelings, not ignore or dismiss them, and then speak confidence in their ability. "This is tough, but so are you." Or "As hard as this feels right now, I do think that you'll get through it."

TEACH HER TO CARE AND CONNECT, NOT COMPARE AND COMPETE

God didn't create any two of us the same. He never intended us to compare ourselves to others but to live as the unique person He created us to be. When we compare, we tend to take the negatives we see about ourselves and compare them to the positives we see in others. Talk to girls about their perspectives of social media posts and others and then challenge them to consider past the surface and see that others are struggling and doubting themselves, too. Even when she's expressing frustration with a "mean girl," help her to see the possibility that the person could be mean because she's hurting or insecure. Learning empathy will help build her emotional intelligence and grow her confidence.

A note about friendships: sometimes parents and youth directors think girls need to have a ton of friends to be confident and popular. However, studies by (Lisa Damour, 2019), a psychologist specializing in ministering to teen girls, find that confident girls often have just one or two close friends. Those in larger group friendships are more likely to find compare and compete for position within the group. Girls with just one or two close friendships feel secure in their relationships and thus more confident with who they are.

Encourage and help provide opportunities for girls to build friendships with girls who are confident and have similar values. Empower girls to navigate tricky friendships, especially during middle school, where comparing, competing, and bullying often run rampant. Tell them that it's okay to be friends but not best friends with people. Explain that there are all different levels of friendships—acquaintances, peers with whom you share classes and activities, and close friends with whom you spend time and share secrets. Choose wisely. Not everyone is close friend material—and that's okay.

MEDIA

Teens today face challenges unlike generations before them because of social media. Cyberbullying. Sexting. Constantly seeing everyone else's Instagram-filtered lives—which they accept as reality and often compare to their own boring lives, leaving them to feel less than and/or left out.

It's important to teach our girls how to look at social media critically—not just accepting it all as fact or reality. Engage her in discussions about the use of photoshopping and filters on posts. Remind her how many photos a person may go through before they post one. Equipping her to think critically as she scrolls will enable her not to view other girls' posts with more thought.

Talk about cyberbullying, walking her through possible scenarios and how she could respond—whether she is the target of the bullying, or a friend is.

It's also important to talk about guys' requests for sexting photos. "An analysis of nearly 500 accounts from 12- to 18-year-old girls about their negative experiences with sexting found that over two-thirds had been asked for explicit images (Damour, 2018)." However, focusing on the possibility that this photo will be shared and seen by hundreds of other people isn't enough to cause her to stop. If a girl believes the guy really likes her, she may trust him and believe he'd never share them with anyone else. Instead, help her understand that it's wrong to request nude photos. Girls aren't going to want to just say no—if they say no, they'll be viewed as a prude, and it may impact her social standing. A frightening possibility for teens who are all about social connection: yet if she does and the photos get passed around, there is a bigger impact. Some helpful questions to get her thinking the situation through include:

- What's the worst possible thing that could happen if you say no to a guy's request?
- What's the best possible thing that could happen if you say no to his request?
- What's the worst possible thing that could happen if you say yes to a guy's request?
- What's the best possible thing that could happen if you say yes to his request?

Discuss her answers. Help her plan ways to respond if or when she is asked to sext. Equipping her to face difficult situations will help build her confidence and respond instead of reacting and create better results.

EQUIP HER TO LIVE CONFIDENTLY

Confidence enables girls to make good decisions without wavering or second-guessing themselves. We can help her learn how to make decisions confidently by giving her opportunities to make choices. Start with easy choices. For instance, asking her where she wants to go for lunch. Then go there to lunch without second-guessing her yourself by asking, “Are you sure? Wouldn’t you rather go...?” There will be moments when you’d make a different choice if it were up to you, but if it really isn’t critical, then go with her decision. If it is critical, ask her if she’s considered the different possible scenarios that could happen, helping her to think through the possibilities herself.

Instead of giving advice about situations, ask open-ended questions that help her think of solutions. Gently guide, but enable her to think through the different possibilities, pros, and cons of each, and make a thought-through decision. Questions become key in helping them think for themselves and learn to figure out how to react, respond, and what to do. One of the biggest gifts we can give our girls is to teach them to think for themselves and to work through the challenges that come their way.

Believe in her. And let her know it.

Listen when she tells you about things at school and in her friend circle. Pay attention. Make time for her every day. Tell her you love her and are proud of her. Ask questions, but don’t interrogate—be genuinely interested.

EQUIP HER TO HANDLE FAILURE

Teach her how to handle failure. Encourage her to try things that she may fail at and help her to learn it’s not the end of the world. Let her make mistakes and learn how to respond. Share your experiences with failing and making mistakes, what you learned, and how you recovered. This helps your daughter know that even you aren’t perfect and make failing a bit more okay.

Katty Kay and Claire Shipman, authors of “The Confidence Code for Girls”, found that the percentage of girls who say they are not allowed to fail rises 150 percent between the ages of 12 and 13, with 45 percent of 13-year-olds indicating they don’t feel able to fail. (Staff, 2020)

While we should look at our failures, examine our weaknesses, and learn from what we see, God never intended us to focus on them. Learn. Grow. Change. Yes, but He doesn’t want us to let negative thinking cripple us. Our feelings of failure or of not being enough can paralyze us and keep us from being all God created us to be.

EQUIP HER TO CELEBRATE HER SUCCESSES

It might be just words of affirmation but celebrate when she succeeds at something. Whether it’s a school project or breaking a habit, or speaking to someone new, celebrate each victory and success. Buy her flowers or a new scarf or a little something she’s wanted. Toast her success with a cup of cocoa (or whatever her favorite beverage is.) Post the success on Facebook. “Diane just finished her science project on time, and it is amazing!”

EQUIP HER TO TAKE CARE OF HER HEART

As females, we are born caregivers to everyone but ourselves. We take care of our friends and, as adults, we take care of our families. But we need to also take care of ourselves. How can girls care for themselves?

- Do the things that make her feel better—about life and about, whether that’s going for a run, reading a book, or talking to a friend (encourage non-food comfort!)
- Keep her room straightened up—creating a “oasis” in her room.
- Get out and get fresh air.
- Take a nap.
- Get plenty of sleep.
- Treat herself to things she enjoys from time to time. A good book. A new craft project. Music she enjoys.

EQUIP HER TO FIGHT THE BATTLE

Hormones and the changes taking place in her body are a big part of her fading confidence. But it’s not the only part of the story. We have an enemy who is out to steal, kill, destroy, and devour. Help girls to see that the battle is real. When they believe a lie about themselves or a situation, remind them of the battle. “Do you think this could be the enemy lying to you? What would God speak into this moment?”

Identifying the lie enables us to speak truth into our hearts and minds. You can’t defeat what you don’t define. Once we recognize and identify the lie, it’s important to replace the lie with the truth. We can do this by memorizing and repeating scripture and telling ourselves what God says and what He has promised. Then live like we believe what God says instead of what the enemy says.

Teach her how to spend time with God. Not just reading the Bible or praying because you should or have to, but spending time talking and learning like you would a friend. Our goal is not for her to check off a certain amount of Bible reading or prayer time every day, but to equip her to fall in love with God and build a strong, intimate relationship with Him.

EXERCISE

When are the moments you most experience or have most experienced God? (Invite participants to share). After listening to everyone’s answers, what new possibilities can you share with girls and/or help them experience God and fall more deeply in love with Him?

CONCLUSION

The enemy doesn't want girls to live confidently. He wants to discourage them and cause them to doubt themselves and doubt God. He knows that if they believe that they are fearfully and wonderfully made, designed intentionally with a purpose that will cause them to impact their world, and can truly do all things through Christ, that they will do amazing things for the kingdom. Our job as parents, grandparents, and church leaders is to encourage, equip and challenge girls to live confidently, trusting God with who they are and the plan He has for their lives.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- What is your biggest takeaway from this seminar?
 - What are three things you will do as a result of today's conversation?
 - How will you pray differently for your girls as a result of this information?
-

RESOURCES

Enough: Discovering a God Who is Enough When You're Not by Tamyra Horst (Pacific Press Publishing)

Real You by Tamyra Horst (AdventSource)

Praying Like Crazy for Your Kids by Tamyra Horst (Pacific Press Publishing)

Untangled: Guiding Girls Through the Seven Transitions into Adulthood by Lisa Damour, Ph.D. (Ballantine Books)

Under Pressure: Confronting the Epidemic of Stress and Anxiety in Girls by Lisa Damour Ph.D. (Ballantine Books)

**Much of this seminar was taken from materials in "Enough" and "Real You."*

LEADERSHIP RESOURCES

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

THE SOURCE OF RESILIENCE

BY JULIAN MELGOSA

At age 17, a friend and I decided to walk through a 7-km train tunnel built under the Cantabrian Mountain Range to join by train the provinces of Burgos and Santander in Spain. This tunnel was built in the 1940's and 1950's, taking 16 years of intense work, but it never was used for its intended purpose. Due to a shortage of public funds, the project was aborted before laying the railroad tracks and abandoned. Years later, my friend and I found it very appealing to walk from one end to the other. It was summer, we were on vacation, and we were looking for adventure. So, we made plans to cross the mountains via the tunnel. "It is not safe," "There are water filtrations," "Rocks are falling inside," "Breathing is difficult in the middle," the "darkness is very dense", and "flashlights stop working because of the humidity," – were some of the warnings from local people. But we had made up our minds. We put on our waterproof boots, got a pair of flashlights with extra batteries, and proceeded to walk beginning at the south portal to exit the tunnel at the north portal. There we would have another friend wait for us with a car.

We started our hike in good spirits and soon reached a point of complete darkness, as the tunnel was in the shape of an arc. Most warnings from local people proved to be exaggerations, but the darkness was truly dense even with the help of flashlights. So, we walked very slowly, which made the experience quite lengthy. Our moods were declining, and we began to grow tired and afraid. We even considered turning around and exit the same way we came. Suddenly, I saw a minuscule dot of light, the size of a pinhead. I excitedly shouted: "Look! The end of the tunnel!" My friend did not think I had an accurate perception and dismissed my excitement. But pretty soon,

Julian Melgosa, PhD is Associate Director for the Department of Education at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists World Headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, USA.

the dot grew bigger, and we concluded that indeed that was the light coming from the north side of the tunnel. That moment was crucial. The rest of the journey was free from fear, doubt, and fatigue. That pinhead gave us hope, motivation, drive, excitement, even elation to reach our goal.

That experience of when we saw the dot of light is like the beginning of resilience. Resilience, the ability to make us adapt and recover after adversity, trauma, and threat, comes from somewhere, an object, an idea, or a purpose that provides that extra needed push. It is up to us to choose the right dot of light for resilience to unfold. For the believer, holding onto the power of God is the surest way to experience resilience during and after trials.

There are Bible characters that show distinct resilience. They all had a vision, a divine ray of light at the end of a long tunnel. Such vision provided the power to overcome adversity and arise with regained strength. Take, for example, Noah. He witnessed the growing corruption of God's children, faced the demands of building the ark amidst mockery, encountered an unrecognizable Earth after the Flood, and saw the decadence of his descendants. Yet, he resiliently kept his faith and accomplished his mission. Noah's resilience must have come from his faithful walk with God (Gen. 6:9) or from God's promise to "never again" curse or destroy the ground because of humans. (Gen. 8:21)

Think of Abraham, who left his country and his people to start a journey to an unknown destination. He faced a multitude of issues related to his wife's barrenness and God's promise of numerous descendants who did not seem to materialize. He experienced significant tensions with members of his family and household. He then faced one of the hardest tests of loyalty—the sacrifice of his teenage son, the son of the promise. The origin of his resilience could have come from God's amazing promise, "I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you" (Gen 12:2), or perhaps from the various altars he built to the Lord (12:7, 8; 13:18)—the most memorable being where he bound and laid his son Isaac.

One of the most significant cases of resilience is Job, who was "blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil." (Job 1:1) Yet, he was given a severe test, which was very difficult to endure, mainly because everyone around him understood that suffering was the direct result of wrongdoings. This test was not just personal but universal; it was a test between the forces of good and evil when Satan claimed that Job's righteousness was simply due to his property, his blessed family, and his state of wellbeing. Therefore, once permitted by God, Satan destroyed Job's wealth, children, and personal health. But Job remained faithful, God restored all his losses, and he lived an additional 140 years. (Job 42:16) He must have had a colossal faith as, after his series of misfortunes, he affirmed: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised." (Job 1:21) This was undoubtedly one of the many thoughts that helped him to be resilient and become stronger than before the trials.

Another remarkable example of resilience in the Bible is Joseph, who suffered at least two traumatic experiences that completely changed his life. Firstly, His own brothers sold him as a slave to a caravan of Ishmaelites on their way to Egypt while he was still a minor. Secondly, he was unjustly thrown into prison because he refused to have sex with his master's wife. But despite the

severity of these events, Joseph bounced back, and God opened the path to Pharaoh's court for Joseph to fulfill the great mission of saving many from death, including his own kin. What was the speckle of light that favored resilience? Ellen G. White points at a distinct moment in Joseph's life, shortly after being sold as a slave:

Then his thoughts turned to his father's God. In his childhood he had been taught to love and fear Him. Often in his father's tent he had listened to the story of the vision that Jacob saw as he fled from his home an exile and a fugitive. He had been told of the Lord's promises to Jacob, and how they had been fulfilled—how, in the hour of need, the angels of God had come to instruct, comfort, and protect him. And he had learned of the love of God in providing for men a Redeemer. Now all these precious lessons came vividly before him. Joseph believed that the God of his fathers would be his God. *He then and there gave himself fully to the Lord, and he prayed that the Keeper of Israel would be with him in the land of his exile. (Patriarchs and Prophets, 213, emphasis added).*

There are also resilient women in the Bible, like Rachel, who grew up in a home with idols, had a cheating father, and endured prolonged suffering because of infertility. Besides, she experienced much distress with Leah, her sister, rival, and co-wife. Think of Ruth, the Moabitess, a member of a pagan people who worshipped gods that required human sacrifices, who lost her husband in her youth and joined her mother-in-law to return to Bethlehem to face a most uncertain future. Or Hannah, who suffered affliction because of her infertility, further aggravated by her husband's lack of understanding, and the provocations of their servant Peninnah, ending in a state of depression. Or Mary, who was called to be the mother of the Messiah, experiencing conflict with her children, and holding a very limited understanding of her son's ministry and role as the Messiah. (see *The Desire of Ages*, 90)

One of the most notable resilient women of the Bible is Naomi. She experienced a number of severe episodes: Her family (father, mother, and two boys) were forced to leave their country because of famine, which is very different from simply leaving in search of new opportunities. Their destination, Moab, provided food and necessities, but the local people held an idolatrous worldview that clashed with Jewish beliefs. Soon Naomi lost her husband, becoming a widow with two dependent sons—a particularly traumatizing situation in a foreign land. Her two sons married local women, a fact that probably brought turmoil to the family given that Moses' law stipulated that Moabites, and their descendants could not enter the assembly of the Lord until after ten generations. (Deut. 23:3) Lastly, the two young men died. At this moment of deepest tragedy, Naomi decided to return to her hometown—another unpleasant experience, for she must admit loss and affliction.

In the end, Naomi emerged victorious out of all calamities. She must have had a powerful faith and a strong hope that the Lord would provide blessings to compensate for so much pain. Ruth, her daughter-in-law, must have served as a powerful instrument of resilience sent by God.

All of these, and many other men and women suffered intense pain, but they emerged stronger after the ordeals. They possessed the resilience that only comes from God. And this blessing

is open to us today. One only has to make a choice, look beyond the here and now and locate that speckle of light and hope at the end of the tunnel. To believe that our Heavenly Father will lead us to a good ending with as minimal pain possible.

Although Psychology has come a long way to accept religiosity as an effective way to cope, today scientists and practitioners know that religious coping is highly effective, particularly for the person of faith, something believers already knew well. Today, it is widely accepted that prayer, scripture reading, worship—individual and collective, the certainty of salvation, the hope in the return of Jesus, and others are decisive in facing adversity resiliently.

Prayer and Bible meditation/verse repetition are principal coping factors because they are powerful and portable. Difficulties in families can be faced much better when contemplating Jesus, the true light at the end of the tunnel, as described in Isaiah 9 where it says: “The people walking in darkness have seen a great light; on those living in the land of deep darkness a light has dawned,” (v. 2), later the text states who the light is: “For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.” (v. 6)

Even in the middle of difficulties, we must accept by faith that temporary suffering will end and may have a purpose even though we might not yet know it. Until then, we need to focus on that small beam of light that appears at the end of every tunnel. In practical terms, it may be a Bible text that we internalize by reflection and repetition. Verses such as “We are hard pressed on every side, but not crushed; perplexed, but not in despair; persecuted, but not abandoned; struck down, but not destroyed,” (2 Corinthians 4:8-9) or “I will say of the Lord, “He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust,” (Psalm 91:2) or “When you pass through the waters, I will be with you; and when you pass through the rivers, they will not sweep over you. When you walk through the fire, you will not be burned; the flames will not set you ablaze,” or “The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him.” (Nahum 1:7)

Another way to gain resilience is to review the blessings of the past. One of the all-time favorite quotes of Ellen G. White is, “We have nothing to fear for the future except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us, and his teaching in our past history.” (9T, p.10) Unless we keep those memories at the forefront of our minds, we will forget them. By sharing our stories with others, writing them down in a journal, and issuing prayers of praise and thanksgiving, we keep those memories alive. These are ways we can show our appreciation to God for specific blessings and gifts.

ASSISTING SINGLE PARENTS IN BUILDING RESILIENCE

BY CLAUDIO AND PAMELA CONSUEGRA

TEXT

“Brethren, I do not count myself to have apprehended; but one thing *I do*, forgetting those things which are behind and reaching forward to those things which are ahead, I press toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus.” Philippians 3: 13,14 (NKJV)

INTRODUCTION

When you hear the term “single parent,” what image comes to mind? Describe exactly what you see in your mind’s eye. Perhaps our attempts towards judging present a picture that is far from accurate. Did you imagine a person of courage and resourcefulness? What about a person who exhibited resilience? What is resilience, and how is it built?

Resilience is defined “as the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress—such as family and relationship problems, serious health problems, or workplace and financial stressors. As much as resilience involves bouncing back from these difficult experiences, it can also involve profound personal growth.” (APA, 2021)

Our scripture verse reminds us of the importance of forgetting what is behind and pressing on. The ability to press on regardless of the past is resilience in action. There is little doubt that

Claudio Consuegra, DMin, is the Director of the Department of Family Ministries at the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventist in Columbia, Maryland, USA.

Pamela Consuegra, PhD, is Associate Director of the Department of Family Ministries at the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists in Columbia, Maryland, USA.

most single parents may be in a situation that has demanded forgetting the past and pressing on. As leaders, how may we be a part of assisting single parents in the process of building resilience?

Perhaps you have heard rude or judgmental comments from others, even church members, towards or about single parents. Leaders, you were called for such a time as this. Some people are prone to make assumptions about the life of others, their financial status, or even their character, without ever knowing the actual story. This may seem unfair, and it is. But we cannot allow someone else's uninformed opinion and misguided judgment to define who we are or how we feel. As a leader, you can educate others and be a part of revealing the true picture of the love of God along with the strength, resilience, and resourcefulness of single parents.

There are a multitude of different routes that takes one into single parenthood. For some, single parenting is a path they purposefully chose. Others may have had difficult journeys strewn with heartbreak, abuse, loss, or grief. Some are parenting alone because their spouse has died suddenly, some were cheated on, and others abandoned. Still, others are parenting alone because they have fled a domestic violent situation or a partner with addiction. The point is that every situation is unique, and the reasons that led to becoming a single parent vary from person to person.

Some admit they do not tell someone they meet for the first time they are a single parent for fear of being labeled or judged. There may also be critical remarks made by relatives, colleagues, acquaintances, or church members. Others say they have been dropped from their social circle or no longer invited when other families get together for meals and outings, including social events at church. Let's repeat what we said earlier...God does not give one's neighbors, friends, family, or even their church family the role of judge!

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS

1. Share a time when you witnessed a church member speaking negatively about another.
2. Did you speak up and respond to the person?
3. If not, why not? If so, what did you say?

SETTING BOUNDARIES

Single parents deal with so much, and the last thing on their to-do list should be dealing with the misplaced judgment of others. Yes, it is hard to listen to hurtful words, and at some point, single parents may even stop being shocked by the rude things people say and how some people treat them differently.

Learning to set appropriate boundaries can help deal with negative emotions. Here are seven tips to share with single parents to put those boundaries in place:

1. **Stop the negative self-talk.** Do not let the criticism of others affect how you talk to yourself. Stick some positive affirmations on your bathroom mirror, read them at the start of each day, memorize them, and repeat them to yourself if those negative thoughts begin to creep in.

2. **Focus on good friends.** Think about those true friends you have and surround yourself with them. Do not surround yourself with so-called “friends” who continue to fill your ears with negative talk.
3. **Focus on what you got right for today.** It is easy to make a list of all the things you wish you could change about the day; however, why not focus on what you got right? Think about the successes in your day, recount them each night before you go to bed, and thank God for each victory.
4. **Honestly express your thoughts.** Do yourself a favor and clear out all your frustrations in your heart and mind. Talk to one of those good friends, write in your journal, blog about them, or go to a counselor. Let go of all the negative thoughts and feelings, clean them out, and try to replace them with positive practices that refuse to let them back in.
5. **Be self-aware.** If you are experiencing negativity, stop and think about what is causing that feeling. Is it bad friends? If so, you need to stop hanging around them. Are you watching too much media that continues to portray negative images? If so, turn off that television. Are you spending too much time sitting around and engaging in negative self-talk? If so, it may be time to get up and use that energy for more positive things. In other words, try to identify the things that are leading to your negative feelings and emotions and replace them with more positive activities.
6. **Go outside.** Negative talk from others or yourself will eventually bring you down. Hit the reset button by going into nature. Go out into the fresh air, breathe deeply, walk, talk with the Creator, and you will feel the anxiety begin to melt away. Exercising in the fresh air is one of the best things you can do to begin to look at things in new ways.
7. **Develop boundaries, walk away, and speak up.** You can choose who to spend time with, who you are going to listen to, and what subjects you will allow conversations to cover. You can say, “NO” and you can walk away. If someone says something out of line about your family or your circumstances, tell the person to stop. Sometimes a person needs to be confronted in order to stop their rude comments.

ADMIT WHEN YOU NEED HELP AND GET IT!

Healing years of emotional pain does not happen overnight. We all want immediate results, but please understand that this process is a journey. There may also be barriers that prevent someone from getting professional help, such as time, lack of insurance coverage that means out-of-pocket expenses, or childcare.

There are times when talking to a trusted friend, or a minister may be exactly what is needed. However, there are other times when talking to a family member may not be in one’s best interest and they may need more intensive, objective, and professional help.

Here are some signs to share with single parents that may indicate a need for outside professional help:

1. **You cannot remember the last time you had a good night's sleep.** The constant cycle of a lack of sleep is a clear sign that things are not working, and you need outside intervention. Your health will soon deteriorate, and this will only make matters worse.
2. **Your networking is not working.** Every attempt at talking to a friend or family member leaves you feeling more discouraged. Perhaps they are too close to the situation and unable to be objective. It may be time to bring in a neutral party.
3. **There was/is physical and/or emotional abuse.** There is no way you should allow this behavior to continue without getting help and finding safety immediately. Physical, emotional, and verbal abuse should never be tolerated. It is not how God would want His daughter to be treated. Even if it is not occurring in the present, you may need professional help to overcome the effects of past abuse. Also, one's child may benefit from counseling if this has been the family's experience.
4. **You are afraid to say certain things in your family.** When you do not feel comfortable sharing your feelings and thoughts without being demeaned, criticized, judged, or bullied, something is terribly wrong. You need a safe place to talk.
5. **You deny, excuse, or choose to ignore the signs of problems such as drug or alcohol abuse.** Substance abuse is an indication of greater problems than simple emotional distress or fatigue. Perhaps you excuse your behavior by saying things like, "I can stop anytime; I am not addicted; I will stop as soon as my parenting situation stabilizes." This is the height of denial and a key indicator that outside help is needed. Once again, the child may benefit from counseling if this has been the family's experience.
6. **You have a recurring thought that your child would be better off without you.** These kinds of negative thoughts are a result of much deeper problems that need professional help. All of us have occasional thoughts that perhaps we are not the best parent; however, when it becomes a daily obsession, this is a key indicator that one needs professional intervention.

If a person needs new eyeglasses, would they break the bottoms out of two glass bottles, get some wire, and make their own? Would one perform a root canal on their own molar with a new power drill? Would you take out your own appendix? Of course not. So, why is it that we are reluctant to seek professional help when we need it? Ahh, there we have that word again... STIGMA! AS leaders, we need to help break down these barriers and stigma.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS FOR LEADERS

1. Who do you think single parents most often talk to when they need a listening ear or advice?
2. Do you think someone in the family is always the best person to talk to?
3. What steps can you take to help single parents seek help when needed?

GOD CHOSE YOU!

All parents have felt inadequate at times, regardless of their situation. All parents have yelled, have said the wrong thing, wished for a do-over or lost their patience. And every time the guilt comes crashing down, we are tempted to think that, because of our perceived deficiencies, we will ruin our child forever. Having these feelings is not unique to single parents.

It is far too easy to think that someone else would do a better job of parenting. But here is the beautiful part! NO parent is perfect. We all have flaws. We all have our good days and our not-so-good days. There will always be days when we wish we could rewind the clock and have a do-over.

Living in a culture driven by constant connectivity and social media does nothing to help the situation. All we need to do is scroll through Facebook, Instagram, Pinterest, etc., and we are reminded how “perfect” all the other parents are. There are the ones whose kid always looks picture-perfect, whose hair and makeup are daily done to perfection, whose homes are spotless, who make delicious homemade meals and do craft projects with their kids each afternoon. Just keep in mind that things are not always as they appear. Things that look perfect on social media are not perfect in reality.

No one is the perfect parent except God the Father. Understanding that God chose them for the divine task of parenting can be life-altering. Imagine that God wrote the following letter to single moms and dads:

My Beloved Single Parent,

You are chosen, you are enough, and you are mine. My love for you is fierce. I am proud of you. I see your heart, the way you seek me, and your devotion to raising your child. Well done, my child.

My child, you are a delight to me. I chose you at the foundation of the world, and I have sanctified you for a great purpose. Beloved, I stand, ready to join you on your parenting journey. The path may be blurry before you, but it is in my sight, and I can see the finish line. I will carry you when you are weak, give you strength, and you will not fall.

Beloved child, you are enough. I have chosen you to parent your child. You belong to me, and I call you worthy. My promise is to give you hope and a future. Do not waste the blessing of time by worrying about tomorrow, for I have already taken care of all your needs.

With my limitless and everlasting love, I will meet the needs of your child also. They will lack nothing. I am sufficient. Their identity is in Me, their provision is in Me, and their future is in Me. I have set them apart for a great purpose. I have tremendous plans for the future of your child.

Watching you raise them delights me. I have chosen you to raise this child. You are the warrior fit to sharpen them, instruct them, direct them, prepare them, train

them, and prepare them to face the world. No weapon formed against them will prosper, for they belong to me.

My darling single parent, do not forget that you are a treasure to Me. You are of inestimable value, and I will never stop loving you!

My Beloved, you are mine forever.

Your Heavenly Father

CONCLUSION

The truth is that, sooner or later, all families may face trauma, adversity, or other stressors. The good news is that God offers a roadmap for adapting to life-changing situations, pressing on, and emerging even stronger than before. That is resilience defined!

So, what can you do as a leader? We must educate those under our care to show love and compassion without being judgmental. What amazing grace and what amazing love Jesus has for each of us, regardless of our backgrounds. In God's sight, single parents are precious, honored, and loved beyond measure. He treasures and loves each with a love that has no limit.

In addition, we must have a compilation of existing resources in our community at our disposal to share with single parents. Every community is unique, and often, a list of resources may be exactly what the single parent is needing.

Above all, model the amazing grace and love of Jesus! It will be contagious as others see Him reflected in your actions. Single parents are raising the next generation, and we need to be there to walk beside them so they, along with their child, will be in heaven.

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SHAPING YOUR CHILD'S WORLDVIEW THROUGH A LOVING RELATIONSHIP SPOUSE

BY JOSEPH KIDDER AND KATELYN CAMPBELL WEAKLEY

“Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.’ And He took them up in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them.” Mark 10:15,16¹

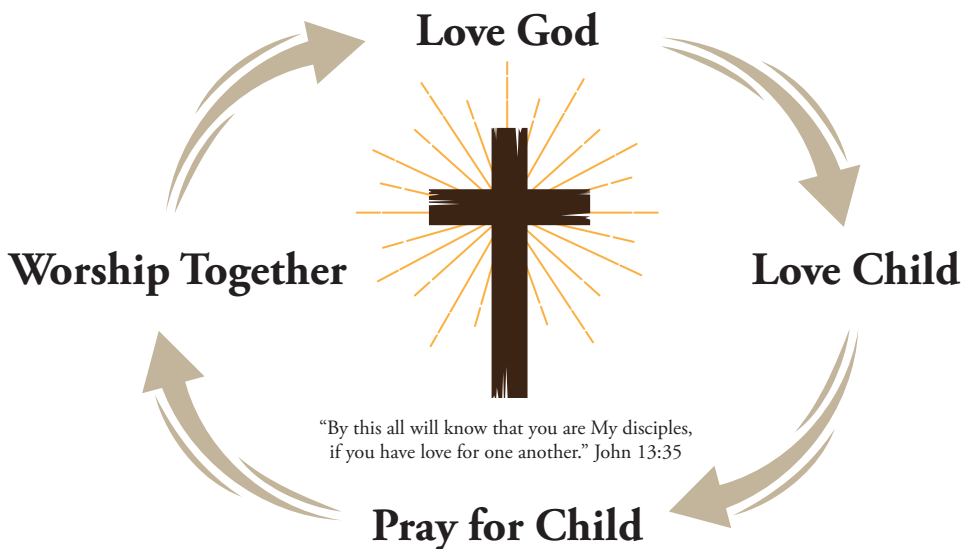
Childhood education is of the utmost significance for forming lifelong patterns and character. Ellen White knew just how important a child’s early years are for developing their life trajectory. “Too much importance cannot be placed upon the early training of children. The lessons learned, the habits formed, during the years of infancy and childhood, have more to do with the formation of the character and the direction of the life than have all the instruction and training of the after years.”² In order to instill a positive Biblical worldview in your children to last a lifetime, it is essential to train them when they are young.

Joseph Kidder, DMin is a Professor of Christian Ministry and Discipleship at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, USA.

Katelyn Campbell Weakley, MDiv, MSW, is the pastor of the Mount Tabor Seventh-day Adventist Church, Portland, Oregon.

Your child's worldview is what is going to help orient him or her in life. The worldview that your child develops will answer key questions for them: Who am I? Why am I here? Where do I come from? Where am I going? What is real? What is right and wrong? Who is God? All of these questions and more are answered by the worldview your child develops, shaping his or her outlook and basic assumptions. No decision is made without a worldview. To make positive, healthy decisions, a child needs a positive, healthy worldview. A Biblical worldview is based on Scripture and can help children make intelligent decisions that will honor God and benefit others as well as themselves.

This article will discuss important principles and practical methods for developing a Biblical worldview in your child through loving God, loving the child, praying for the child, and worshipping together. You will note that this process is all rooted in love, which is the mark of the followers of Christ. "By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another" (John 13:35). If we are to train up children to be disciples of God, we must demonstrate our discipleship through love. We begin by loving God ourselves, which grows our love for our children, which invigorates our prayers for our children, which strengthens our family worships, which in turn increases our love for God. As we participate in the process illustrated below, we will find our children growing in God and developing a Biblical worldview.



LOVING GOD

How do you start teaching children to love God and abide by his Word? Begin by loving God yourself. When a baby encounters a new food and is uncertain of it, the mother or father will usually take a bite to demonstrate that the food is good. When it comes to God, parents can join the Psalmist in telling their children, "taste and see that the Lord is good" (Psalm 34:8). If you as a

parent regularly enjoy and appreciate God's presence in your life, this will do two things. First, you will give a real-life demonstration of what it is that you are trying to teach. You can tell them what it is like to love God, but these will only be words until they can see a demonstration of what this means. We will unpack this idea more when we discuss modeling below but let us note here that deeds tend to speak more loudly than words. Showing them your enjoyment of Jesus is much more powerful than either telling them to enjoy Jesus or just saying that you love Jesus.

A second result of enjoying God yourself is that your desire for your child to develop a Biblical worldview will become more genuine and thus more powerful. If you genuinely love and enjoy the Lord, that will shine through in all that you do, including developing your child's worldview. We may assume that if you are reading this article, you already appreciate the presence of God in your life. If this is the case, that is beautiful! Keep diving deeper into your own love for God. In her book *Opening Your Child's Spiritual Windows*, Cheri Fuller writes, "The truth is, *you* must first enjoy God; otherwise, your children probably won't. And second, if you don't have a loving, trusting relationship with your children, they will tend to reject or miss much of the influence your spiritual life could have on them."³ The fact is that as a parent, you will serve as a bridge between your child and Jesus. The more you cultivate your relationship with Jesus, and the more you cultivate your relationship with your child, the stronger that bridge can become.

LOVING YOUR CHILD

Jesus loved children. "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. Assuredly, I say to you, whoever does not receive the kingdom of God as a little child will by no means enter it.' And He took them up in His arms, laid His hands on them, and blessed them." (Mark 10:13-16) If Jesus cared so much for children, ought we not demonstrate that same love for our own children? We have been called to show the utmost love to our boys and girls.

Jesus took caring for children so seriously that he said, "whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to sin, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were drowned in the depth of the sea." (Matthew 18:6) Continuing this idea, Paul wrote in Colossians 3:21, "Fathers, do not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged." Parents are expected to cherish and lovingly direct their children in the path of righteousness. This cannot be done without a close, loving connection between the parent and the child.

If you have a strong love for Jesus but a weak relationship with your child, your child will not be drawn any closer to Jesus. If anything, your child may want to turn further away from him. One way or another, they will associate you and Jesus. If the child feels secure and loved and cared for by you, they will likely experience God positively. However, if your child does not feel a close relationship with you but sees your close relationship with God, there is a good chance they will experience him negatively. In a recent multi-generational study, sociologist Vern Bengtson notes

this fact: “By every measure in this study, a young adult was more likely to share their parents’ religious beliefs and participation if they felt that they had a close relationship with those parents.”⁴ Relationship is key.

Along this line, we must not be eager as to manipulate our children to come to God. Author Karyn Henley writes, “We must not push for what we would like to see happen. Instead, we must wait on God and give him room and time to work as he wills. We have the privilege of watching God work in the lives of children, so that their ‘faith might not rest on men’s wisdom, but on God’s power.’ (1 Corinthians 2:5)”⁵ By simply being in a loving relationship with your child, God can use you in his time to draw your child to him.

When Jesus was on earth, he told his disciples, “He who has seen me has seen the Father.” (John 14:9) In much the same way, children will understand their heavenly Father by looking at their parents. Therefore, in addition to enjoying and loving God, parents need enjoy and love their children.

There are many simple ways to demonstrate your love for your child. You can play together, cook together, or sing together. You can come up with a unique pet name for them, make a big deal when they accomplish a task and tell them you missed them after being apart. When they are frustrated, you can listen to their frustrations and empathize with them. When they are irresponsible, you can tell them, “I love you too much to let you do that; please stop.” When they are sad, you can wrap them up and gently rock them.⁶ Let your child know you love them as often as you can, both when it is easy and when it is difficult to love them. The more they hear it, the more the love between you will grow. It is through conscientiously growing the love and trust between you and God and between you and your child that forms a strong base foundation for your child’s Biblical worldview development. Your child will grow to trust that the taste of the Lord is indeed good.

PRAYING FOR YOUR CHILD

As you are loving and caring for your child, you will, of course, be praying for him or her. This is an important part of your child’s Biblical worldview development. As you pray for your child’s Christian development, remember to pray for these key areas:⁷

1. **Pray for their salvation.** “Therefore, I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory.” (2 Timothy 2:10)
2. **Pray for God to direct in their lives.** “Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths.” (Proverbs 3:5,6)
3. **Pray for them to develop compassionate hearts.** “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you.” (Ephesians 4:32)
4. **Pray for their physical and spiritual protection.** “...The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; the God of my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield and

the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge; my Savior, you save me from violence.” (2 Samuel 22:2,3)

5. **Pray for the development of their character.** “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” (1 Corinthians 15:58)
6. **Pray for God to fill their hearts with joy.** “...Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength.” (Nehemiah 8:10b)
7. **Pray for them to desire that which God desires.** “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh.” (Ezekiel 36:26)
8. **Pray that they come to know God’s love.** “For this reason, I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ...that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God.” (Ephesians 3:14,17-19)
9. **Pray that they would come to love the Word of God.** “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path.” (Psalm 119:105)
10. **Pray that God would give them a servant’s attitude.** “Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people.” (Ephesians 6:7, NIV)

Prayer is a powerful tool. Continually pour out your prayers to God on behalf of your children and he will hear and answer your prayers. It has been seen time and time again that parents who are consistent in praying for their children will see their sons and daughters grow and remain in the faith.

“Your compassionate Redeemer is watching you with love and sympathy, ready to hear your prayers and to render you the assistance which you need,” Ellen White writes. “He knows the burdens of every mother’s heart and is her best friend in every emergency. His everlasting arms support the God-fearing, faithful mother. When upon earth, He had a mother that struggled with poverty, having many anxious cares and perplexities, and He sympathizes with every Christian mother in her cares and anxieties. That Savior who took a long journey for the purpose of relieving the anxious heart of a woman whose daughter was possessed by an evil spirit will hear the mother’s prayers and will bless her children.”⁸ The prayers of a mother, or father, seeking God’s intervention in the life of a child will not be ignored.

WORSHIPPING TOGETHER

The baseline of your child’s love for God can be grown through consistent family worship. In *Child Guidance*, Ellen White writes, “In the morning the Christian’s first thoughts should be upon God. Worldly labor and self-interest should be secondary. Children should be taught to respect and

reverence the hour of prayer.... It is the duty of Christian parents, morning and evening, by earnest prayer and persevering faith, to make a hedge about their children. They should patiently instruct them—kindly and untiringly teach them how to live in order to please God.”⁹ Several components can be used to grow children in Christ during family worship.

First is prayer in worship. When the child is an infant, praying with him or her will mean the parent showing the child a reverent posture (such as folded hands and closed eyes) and then leading in a brief sentence prayer. As the infant grows older, the parent can give longer prayers. When the child grows out of the toddler stage, he or she may be able to start doing repeated prayers, where the parent says a brief sentence and the child repeats. Eventually, the child will be able to say small prayers without assistance. We encourage parents to demonstrate an appreciation for prayer so that the child can see it is a special conversation between them and God. Parents should teach their children that prayer is an opportunity to talk heart-to-heart with their Heavenly Father. This is demonstrated in the Psalms and in Jesus’ own prayer life, which show openness and authenticity towards God in sharing hurts, joys, frustrations, problems, and victories.

Singing is also a wonderful component of worship. Ellen White once wrote that, “Singing is as much an act of worship as is prayer.”¹⁰ Children learn well with song and rhyme and usually heartily enjoy singing. Teach them children’s Bible songs for them to understand and connect well with the lyrics, but don’t be afraid to teach them some hymns and praise songs as well—they can often pick them up quicker than you may think. Family singing can be a very bonding experience and is a great way to worship God. Songs can be sung all throughout the day: on walks, on car rides, at school, etc. If you encourage a heart of song in your child, this way of worshipping God can be integrated all throughout their day. Paul writes, “Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing with grace in your hearts to the Lord.” (Colossians 3:16)¹¹ Singing glorifies God, grows his word in your heart, and causes you to walk in the joy of the Lord.

Another component to worship is discussing life together. Share how your day has gone and point out how you have seen God at work in your life. Jesus shared much with his disciples, pointing out everyday tasks and objects like grain, light, farming, and more to demonstrate and discuss spiritual truths. There is much to be learned about God through sharing about each other’s day.

Of course, a key worship component is reading the Bible itself, preferably a simple translation or from storybooks—such as Bible stories written for children or stories which talk about God or teach Biblical morals in real life. Both kinds of reading are edifying for children. Parents may be tempted to only read storybook versions of the Bible to their children. Still, it is good to start reading Scripture together from a young age so they can start appreciating and getting used to the Bible itself. By reading from the Bible, your child will gain a Biblical awareness of the world and begin to see how scripture can apply to everyday life. Children will learn right from wrong as well as learning about the character of God.¹² This level of learning can only be achieved

through exposing your child to the Bible itself. Parents can read to infants and young children, but as children grow older, family worship can also be a good time for them to practice reading for themselves. As you read together, ask questions about the reading and answer questions they may have. Engage with the stories and discuss together.

We recommend starting each day with a short worship as a family to invite God into your home and hearts. Morning worship needs to be no longer than ten minutes and centered on what your children identify with best. You can sing a few songs or read a portion of scripture or a children's Bible story book and end with a prayer. Longer family worships (30 minutes or less) can be a nice way to conclude the day together in the evening.

In Ellen White's book *Prayer*, she writes, "Family worship should not be governed by circumstances. You are not to pray occasionally and, when you have a large day's work to do, neglect it. In thus doing you lead your children to look upon prayer as of no special consequence. Prayer means very much to the children of God and thank offerings should come up before God morning and evening. Says the psalmist, 'O come, let us sing unto the Lord: let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation. Let us come before his presence with thanksgiving and make a joyful noise unto him with psalms.' Fathers and mothers, however pressing your business, do not fail to gather your family around God's altar."¹³

Family worship is of the utmost importance for developing a Biblical worldview in your child. You can pray together, read together, sing together, and share together. This is a wonderful way to shape your child's perspective on God and the world, better solidifying their Biblical worldview.

CONCLUSION

Relationship requires a lot of work, commitment, and patience. It doesn't happen overnight. As a parent, though, the relationship you have with your child is the strongest factor for imparting a Biblical worldview to them. Thus, it is worth the time and effort.

The love that you show your child, the time you spend in prayer on their behalf, the experience of worshipping together all add to your child's growth in Christ. Ellen White writes in *Evangelism*, "By your manner of dealing with the little ones you can by the grace of Christ mold their characters for everlasting life, or by a wrong course of action you can give them the impress of a satanic character. Never act from impulse in governing children. Let authority and affection be blended. Cherish and cultivate all that is good and lovely and lead them to desire the higher good by revealing Christ to them."¹⁴

The more love you show your child, the more love they will have for God. It's as simple as that. Make time for your child, listen to him or her, show your child respect and bring out the best he or she has to offer.

NOTES

- ¹ All Bible quotes are taken from the NKJV.
- ² Ellen White, *Ministry of Healing*, (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2003), 380.
- ³ Cheri Fuller, *Opening Your Child's Spiritual Windows: Ideas to Nurture Your Child's Relationship with God* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2001), 26.
- ⁴ As quoted in Dustin McClure, "Helping Kids Keep the Faith," Fuller Youth Institute, retrieved March 28, 2019, <https://fulleryouthinstitute.org/articles/helping-kids-keep-the-faith>.
- ⁵ Karyn Henley, *Child-Sensitive Teaching* (Cincinnati, OH: The Standard Publishing Company, 1997), 31.
- ⁶ You can find many ideas to show your children you love them. Here are two great websites to start giving you ideas: <https://afineparent.com/positive-parenting-faq/101-simple-ways-to-love-your-child.html>; <https://www.lifehack.org/articles/lifestyle/10-little-ways-show-your-kids-you-love-them-every-day.html>.
- ⁷ For more ideas of what to pray for your children, see what Lisa Jacobson writes at <https://club31women.com/12-powerful-verses-pray-children/>, and Nancy Jergins at <https://www.imom.com/10-ways-to-pray-for-your-child/#.XIGTx2hKhPY>
- ⁸ Ellen White, *Adventist Home* (Silverspring, MD: Review and Herald, 2002), 204.
- ⁹ Ellen White, *Child Guidance* (Washington, D.C: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1954), 519.
- ¹⁰ *The Youth Instructors Articles*, (Morrisville, NC: Lulu Press Incorporated, 2013), 1238.
- ¹¹ Note also Ephesians 5:18b,19: "but be filled with the Spirit, speaking to one another in psalms and hymns and spiritual songs, singing and making melody in your heart to the Lord."
- ¹² Wesley Haystead, *Everything You Want to Know About Teaching Young Children: Birth—6 Years* (Ventura, CA: Regal Books, 1989), 12-13.
- ¹³ Ellen White, *Prayer* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 2002), 189.
- ¹⁴ Ellen White, *Evangelism* (Silverspring, MD: Review and Herald, 2003), 582.

THE IMPACT OF ADVERSE CHILDHOOD EXPERIENCES

BY INGRID WEISS SLIKKERS AND ERICK PENA

INTRODUCTION

It was in the late 1990's that the original Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACEs- <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/aces/index.html>) study through CDC-Kaiser Permanente was done. This groundbreaking research opened the door to the reality that childhood and household challenges, including but not limited to abuse, neglect and even divorce, can dramatically impact a person's health and well-being throughout life. Much work has been done since 1997 to further study and subsequently reduce ACEs' impact, but the sad truth is that although much effort has been put forth to combat adverse experiences, ACEs are still very prevalent today and even our own congregations are touched. Notwithstanding that this study was done in the United States, the implications from it are transferable into all areas around the globe and give us reason to pause.

So, can ACEs be reduced? This is clearly the goal and should be emphasized and tirelessly worked towards. However, considering the difficult state of our world, we would like to suggest that our focus should also be on lessening the *impact* of ACEs by buffering these negative experiences with intentional positive ones. "Research demonstrates that both positive and adverse experiences shape brain development and health across the life span." (Bethell, Jones, Gombojav, Linkenbach, & Sege, 2019) In a study that used data accumulated by the 2015 Wisconsin Behavioral Risk Factor Survey, the researchers concluded that "assessing

Ingrid Weiss Slikkers, LMSW, CCTP, CFTP is an Assistant Professor and Executive Director for the International Center for Trauma Education & Care School of Social Work at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan, USA.

Erick Pena, MDiv, MSW is currently working at a community mental health center providing therapy to children and adolescents in South Bend, IN, USA.

and proactively promoting PCEs [Positive Childhood Experiences] may reduce adult mental and relational health problems, even in the concurrent presence of ACEs.” (Bethell, Jones, Gombojav, Linkenbach, & Sege, 2019).

This chapter will briefly discuss the seven positive childhood experiences suggested by the forementioned researchers and published by the *Journal of American Medical Association Pediatric* applying them specifically within our Seventh-day Adventist context. It is our hope that as Christians the clarity of the connection to our faith practices will further a sense of refocus and energy into our intentionality of implementation.

1. THE ABILITY TO TALK ABOUT FEELINGS

Children need to feel free to talk about whether they are afraid, alarmed, sad, happy, or excited. As adults, we need to normalize, to model, and teach feelings recognition and regulation. Are we pausing and discussing what emotions our Bible heroes felt? Even allowing for mixed emotions. How did the children of Israel feel when they started to walk across the Red Sea? Excited? In awe? A little scared? We need to allow the presence and acknowledgment of all feelings even in the presence of our faith and belief. Knowing where these feelings are felt in the body can help better identify and express them accurately. Structured check ins of feelings are ideal and become part of the culture of caring for each other.

2. A FELT EXPERIENCE THAT FAMILY WILL STAND BY DURING DIFFICULT TIMES

Children need to know that no matter what they do or what happens to them, they have a family that will be there for them. A family that will not abandon each other when things get tough but that will hold on to tighter than ever before. For some, this concept weighs heavy as to what “family” means. Many feel concerned due to single parent homes or a grandparent raising a child that do not fit the norm. But note, the message is “family,” it does not name which members. Researchers have long established the importance of a primary care providers and connected attachment. Even if the family is going through devastating circumstances, is there a family member that will be there through thick and thin (this does not mean they have to have all the answers or solutions, simply being there is what is important)?

3. ENJOYING PARTICIPATING IN COMMUNITY TRADITIONS

Participating in community activities is another experience that can buffer the effects of ACEs. Participating in community or church traditions can clarify and strengthen family values and help deliver sources of identity. Community and church traditions can help families bond closer together. These experiences guarantee that people take time for emotional connection, and this has

been seen throughout history and cultures. Traditions help to provide kids with a sense of security in such a chaotic world. Starting with Ellen White's writings and as an Adventist denomination, we have celebrated and encouraged traditions, small and large. What can we do to continue to support that our communities are able to do this?

4. FELT A SENSE OF BELONGING IN HIGH SCHOOL

Adolescence is a critical and delicate stage in a person's life. This is the stage where young people are trying to figure out what is happening in their bodies and who they are. Feeling like they belong in an environment can truly become a factor in how they deal with the harmful stresses in their lives. It may seem obvious that our academies work intentionally on this, but not every adolescent is able to attend our schools or even feels this. Sensing they belong in an environment can truly become a factor in how they deal with the harmful stress teens face in their lives. Here again we can see the positive impact that a youth group, singing group or even a weekly Bible study in a home can make.

The Sanctuary Model of Care is a secular model that was developed by psychiatrist Sandra Bloom (<https://www.thesanctuaryinstitute.org/about-us/the-sanctuary-model/>) to promote safety and recovery from adversity. At the core, this model reminds us of the importance of, instead of asking, "what is wrong with you?" as a society, we ask, "what happened to you?" Bringing this question to the forefront can help high school students develop empathy for each other and, as a byproduct, increase a sense of belonging during this pivotal stage in life.

5. A FEELING OF BEING SUPPORTED BY FRIENDS

Humans are relational beings. When God created Adam, he made it clear that it was not good for humans to be alone (Genesis 2:18). Even though a long time has passed since God expressed those words, they continue to be true today. A feeling of being supported by friends is an essential part of resilience building. It is so important that even Jesus, the perfect lamb of God, used it for his benefit. Jesus had at least three intimate friends in Peter, James and John. There are various suggestions that a quick internet search will show as to the number of friends needed to be healthy. Most do seem to agree that 2-3 close friends are vital. Are we encouraging and teaching our youth how to have deep relationships with a couple of people versus the need to have hundreds of superficial friends on social media?

6. HAVING AT LEAST TWO NON-PARENT ADULTS WHO GENUINELY CARED ABOUT THEM

The response of individuals who had a high ACE score but who were able to manage the effects of trauma and live a productive life show the importance of key relationships. According to this study having at least two other adults that genuinely care about a child is as important as having parents or a parent that does the same. Church congregations are fertile ground for children to build

healthy relationships outside of their parental circle. A genuine church community can provide the external influence that children need to grow and thrive. The question surfaces again, what are we doing to intentionally assure this is happening?

7. FEELING SAFE AND PROTECTED BY AN ADULT AT HOME

No one can argue against the importance of a child's safety at home. Home is supposed to be a place of refuge, a place where the hostile world is locked outside, and those within the walls of the home are loved and protected even if it is not perfection. Again, the question arises sometimes as to "what if I don't have the ideal two parent home?" Read the line again. It says, "adult." This might even be an adult sibling that still lives at home that can make a significant positive impact. Can we share this message with everyone?

CONCLUSION

We all desire a perfect family and environment for every child, but we know that is not reality and that our enemy comes after our children. But suppose the principles of these seven positive experiences are further intentionally incorporated into everything we do as an Adventist community, from relationships to programs? With the help of our Lord and Savior, Adventism will become a catalyst for building resilience within our homes, the church, community, and world.

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A BIBLICAL VIEW OF HUMAN SEXUALITY

BY ROBERTO IANNÒ

INTRODUCTION

This essay aims to stimulate a psychological and spiritual reflection on the value of sexuality as a gift for the intimacy of the couple and, at the same time, as a means of spiritual growth to better understand how God loves humanity.¹

This dyad—sexuality and spirituality—seems so atypically assembled, and foreign to common religious thought. Furthermore, it is no wonder because we tend to be children of Greek culture, which elevates the invisible—that is, the *soul*—to eternal and spiritual value, and reduces the tangible—that is, the *body*—to carnal baseness. Within this paradigm, we unknowingly evoke taboos, censures, and personal embarrassments to the point of excluding, for some of us, sexuality from the gifts of creation. Or, at least, accepting sexuality as created by God but somehow denied to Adam and Eve until their first Sabbath was over. This is the essence on which the unique Adventist question arises, whether a couple can have intimate moments during the holy Sabbath hours.

SEXUALITY IN THE BIBLE

However, in the Bible, we do not find a trace of this tension. Sexuality is recognized as a gift from God and one of the means given to humanity to know God and His love for humanity. A

Roberto Iannò, DMin(c), is the Director of the Department of Family Ministries for the Italian Union of Seventh-day Adventists in Rome, Italy.

text, among many, found in Ezekiel 16:7, 8, narrates God’s covenant with the Children of Israel in the following amorous terms:

“...You grew and developed and entered puberty. Your breasts had formed and your hair had grown, yet you were stark naked. Later I passed by, and when I looked at you and saw that you were old enough for love, I spread the corner of my garment over you and covered your naked body. I gave you my solemn oath and entered into a covenant with you, declares the Sovereign Lord, and you became mine.”

This text moves me. It shows that God is not ashamed to mention parts of the female body—breasts—created not only for breastfeeding but also to arouse amorous emotions in her husband. This reality elevates intimacy between husband and wife to theological history of God’s love for humanity. God describes, step by step, the building blocks of sexual attraction and commitment: from careful observation about growth, to courtship; from a covenant relationship to sexual intimacy.

Even the apostle Paul makes a daring statement in 1 Corinthians 7:5. The biblical message is clear when it declares: “Do not deprive each other except perhaps by mutual consent and for a time, so that you may devote yourselves to prayer. Then come together again so that Satan will not tempt you because of your lack of self-control.” Here, Paul stresses that our prayer life and sexuality are an integrated part of a whole. Gary Thomas comments on this passage by stating: “Use marriage the way God intended it. Meet your sexual needs by making love to your spouse. Then your mind and soul will be more open to prayer.”²

Following the analysis between spirituality and sexuality shared above, Ellen White offers her own association between intimacy and heavenly realities when she states: “Angels of God will be guests in the home, and their holy presence will hallow the marriage chamber.”³ Of course, many couples would not only be very embarrassed to think that God is watching them in their bedroom, but may also be strongly inhibited by that notion.⁴

SEXUALITY AS A WAY TO UNDERSTAND GOD’S LOVE FOR HUMANITY

If we can accept the idea that sexuality has its legitimacy in the spiritual context, then we can discover its different nuances. As we grow in learning how to love our spouse—a love that is, at the same time, both spiritual and physical—we may also discover the various aspects of God’s love for humanity.

A GIFT

As God—in order to love humanity—*gives* Himself; also, husbands and wives—in conjugal love—must remember that sexuality is fundamentally a gift of self. This divine principle originates in the well-known text found in John 3:16 that says: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life.” Evidently, the text is describing mature love, not self-absorbed but open to the otherness of the person loved. This model of sexuality has distanced itself from the kind found at first in youthful forms, characterized mainly by the desire to possess another. Whether it is about the most beautiful girl in the school, or the most handsome and athletic boy that makes her feel beautiful and appreciated.

A DUTY

As God—in loving humanity—binds Himself to *duty*, so—in conjugal love—sexuality is similarly a *duty* of husband and wife towards each other. When we think of God and His willingness to meet our needs, we take it for granted that He will always be ready to meet our needs, even when *He may not want to*. However, the same Pauline notion moves our Creator and moves us: “For Christ’s love *compels us*” (2 Cor 5:14). This double aspect of “gift” and “duty” is evoked in the marriage vows, *“for better or worse.”* As such, even the sexual act between husband and wife responds to the same law, *donated* and, at the same time, *due*. This is the profound message of the principle shared by Paul when he says: “The wife does not have authority over her own body but yields it to her husband. In the same way, the husband does not have authority over his own body but yields it to his wife” (1 Cor 7:4).

This symmetrical ownership of one’s body reminds us that our body—our sexuality—is not only *donated* to our spouse but also *due*, as he/she is the one to whom we have dedicated our whole life. At the same time, this relationship may become asymmetrical when one spouse wants to dominate over the other. In the past, it was men who traditionally ruled over women, deciding “when” and “how” to have sexual intercourse “on”—and not “with”—his wife, without wondering if she was ready to give herself. Today, it may be the woman who, reacting to unjust male domination, may engage in a counter-revolution declaring: “it is my body.” Of course, we know this is not a biblical concept from either the male or female perspective. This reality begs the question: how can a couple experience God’s love in sexuality if one of them “dominates” the other, or if one of them distance himself/herself from the other? Sexuality—permeated of spirituality—will be careful not to participate in power play, where “a headache” or “a stressful working day” becomes a tool for dominating or avoiding the other.

TAKING CARE

As God—in loving humanity, *adapts Himself* to the other by incarnation, a similar process takes place in conjugal human love. Since, in loving our spouse we dramatize that sexuality is also about adapting ourselves to the other.

This is what a couple experiences—especially in their intimate dimension—when they acknowledge their sexual peculiarities—not only physically but also emotionally. Man and woman—with their inherent limitations—experience physical pleasure differently. Yet, spiritually mature sexuality teaches the spouses to be incarnational, to learn and adapt to the other’s way of experiencing sexuality. Love—as Paul asserts—“is not self-seeking” (1 Cor 13:5). Love does not impose its own sexuality on the other—holding it up as the ideal—but acknowledges the differences and embraces love’s mutually beneficial acts. Spiritually mature couples learn how to dialogue for understanding and respond to their partner’s intimate and sexual needs by asking God for wisdom in responding to those needs.

UNITY

As God—in loving humanity—loved in the perfect *unity* of the divine triad, so husbands and wives, in conjugal love—should nourish the, albeit imperfect, *unity* of the conjugal dyad. Sexual intimacy is one of God’s gifts to marriage, so that a husband and his wife—and vice-versa—in the few years they will have together on earth, be able to experience and almost symbiotic—but differentiated unity. Being facetious, we could say that a couple may have an argument before or after sexual intercourse, but hardly *during* it. This is true because if husbands and wives can accept the gift that God is offering them in marriage, may once again see themselves as a unit, being able to declare: “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Gen 2:23).

As such, the sexual act can be seen as the crowning achievement of a conflict resolution between husband and wife and as the prerequisite for that reconciliation. In the sexual act, they can celebrate that they are “more” than simply arguments and disagreements. Husbands and wives may express to each other they no longer want anything to create the type of physical distance between them that will not allow them to see each other as their other half. They may categorically declare that in donating themselves to each other—even before an issue is completely resolved—that they tangibly believe in the “us” and in what is still good about their union.

SEXUALITY AND SOME HINDRANCES

To enjoy this type of sexuality—and not being ashamed before God—our sexuality must be cleansed from past experiences, traumas, or just negative views about it.

If someone has experienced abused, it will be difficult for them to see sexuality as a gift—even less—as a duty. Instead, this will only evoke pain.

If someone has had premature experiences, they may see sexuality as a way of being accepted or controlling someone else—both typical dynamics in adolescent sexuality.

If someone has been exposed to prolonged pornography, they may see sexuality as a performing act—even worse—they may not be able to see the other person at all, as he/she will just be an *object* of their desires.

If someone has been taught to control the other person, it will be difficult to take care of their spouse—even in the sexual context.

CONCLUSION

Sexual unity is—or can become—a spiritual experience because the *other* is the “*temple of the Holy Spirit*” (1 Cor 6:19). Because even in the sexual experience, Christian spouses must see each other as sanctified bodies in which the Holy Spirit is present. Husbands and wives would be able to enter—physically and spiritually—and experience the *uniqueness* God intended for their marriage. Sexuality can be a way of pleasing each other and learning to be generous with one another. In marital sexuality, husbands and wives learn to give out of love, not out of obligation, even when they do not feel like it. In marital sexuality, husbands and wives can learn that faithfulness is as important as pleasure. Therefore, sexuality within a committed marriage, can teach husbands and wives a lot about God, since sexuality was intentionally created by God and His fingerprint can be clearly identified in this gift to marriage.

NOTES

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REPRINTED ARTICLES

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

A SPIRITUALLY VIBRANT ADVENTIST HOME

BY WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

WHEN YOU THINK ABOUT SOMEONE who has influenced your faith, who do you think of?

I (Elaine) think about my grandmother, Gwendolyn Powell. She loved her church, her family, and most of all, Jesus. She knew no strangers, and never missed an opportunity to share her faith, with all of us in the household or anyone who came to our door: the mail carrier, the repair-person, the salesperson, or old and new neighbors. Now, to be sure, she would entice you with her wonderful baked goods: cookies, cakes, Jamaican sweet bread/buns, and coconut treats. I do remember her spiritual discipline of praying—three times a day. She would be on her knees first thing in the morning and last thing at night. Even at the ripe young age of 99 she was still visiting sick, shut-in, and elderly persons—praying with them and for them.

I (Willie) think about my dad—a pastor. He was a wonderful man, full of joy, patience, kindness, wisdom, a genuine love for people, and unconditional dedication to his family and his God. Everyone seemed comfortable with him because he had no pretense about anything. He was comfortable in his skin and made those who spoke with him feel comfortable as well. As a child I loved to hear him sing and pray at our family worships. His singing was joyful and filled with gratitude to God for His provision, presence, peace, and salvation. He loved to visit his members and neighbors; he was well known in the community as someone who would help if you had a need. Young and old alike would seek him out for counsel and encouragement. He was my spiritual hero and model, who made me long to be connected to the God he spoke about, prayed to, and

Willie Oliver, PhD, CFLE and **Elaine Oliver**, PhDc, LCPC, CFLE
are Directors of the Department of Family Ministries at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
World Headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, USA.

preached about His imminent coming. There wasn't anything I could not talk to my dad about, and I experienced God through the care he demonstrated for my mom, my siblings, and me.

People that influence our faith are people we trust and look up to. It could be family members, close friends, or specific people that earned our trust, such as a church member or a pastor.

When we hear such words as *nurture*, *retention*, *discipling*, *reclaiming*, and even *evangelism*, we usually look at the organizational structure—the local church. However, our households of faith—our homes—can be centers of evangelism for nurturing faith in God and future commitment to the church.

Today's households are made up of multiple types of family formations. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, a household refers to “all the people who occupy a housing unit.” So you could have family members who are related by birth, marriage, or adoption, in addition to friends, distant relatives, employees, coworkers, foster kids, boarders, or others living together in such a unit.

Households can also be classified by types, such as the nuclear family, the single-parent home, the extended family home, empty nesters, families with boomerang kids, single adults living alone, cohabiting couples, same-sex households, and urban families.

When we look at trends in such twenty-first century households, we can see that it is more common to have families with boomerang kids— married young adults who are moving in with their parents to save money. Single adults are living with roommates, and a number of young adults are creating an *urban* family by living together.

We also see millennials delaying marriage and family, and that post-Christian culture is shaping our children and adults. That becomes visible in declining church attendance.

People are using many available resources, such as Facebook/ YouTube/ or Podcasts for faith formation. Such resources make it easy to invest in faith without going to a certain church. Access to Bible studies is available from various sources and is no longer dependent on someone's church or religion.

We do recognize there are multiple types of households that do not fit the traditional or stereotypical construct of family, which are now more the norm than the exception. Most people will progress through several types of household formations throughout their life span. Therefore, pastors and church leaders must have an interest in such diversity of households, since most of our churches do reflect them. Each of these household arrangements holds opportunities for discipling, nurturing, and reclaiming of members through the ability to form rituals and relationships within the household.

In 2018 the Barna Group conducted research on more than 2,000 Christian households to discover how faith is nurtured within households. The study unfolded powerful insights on how faith is handled in practicing Christian homes, and determined that all families can be categorized into four levels of spiritual vibrancy: dormant, hospitable, devotional, and vibrant.

Dormant households do not talk about God or faith together; they do not pray or read the Bible together regularly, and they do not welcome nonfamily visitors regularly. This level of spiritual vibrancy consisted of 28 percent of all families.

Hospitable households welcome nonfamily visitors regularly— several times a month—and they might participate in some spiritual activities, but not all of them participate regularly. This level of spiritual vibrancy included 14 percent of all families.

Devotional households talk about God or faith together; they pray and read the Bible together regularly, but they do not welcome nonfamily visitors several times a month. One third (33 percent) of all families belonged to this level of spiritual vibrancy.

Vibrant households talk about God or faith together; they pray together, read the Bible together regularly, and welcome nonfamily visitors several times a month. A quarter (25 percent) of all families consisted of this level of spiritual vibrancy.

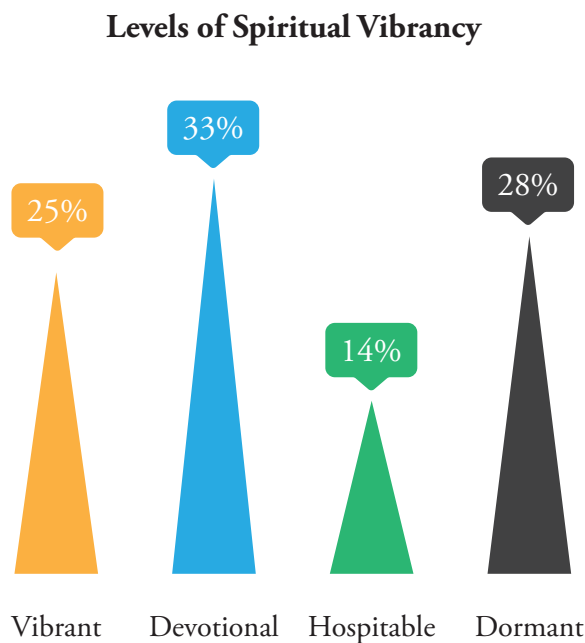


Figure 1. BARNA *Households of Faith* Study 2018, n=2,347

Barna's research findings also determined that while the size, shape, and trends of households are evershifting, the impact of the home remains the same in that it continues to play a pivotal role in instilling, nurturing, and shaping one's Christian faith. Ellen White states in *The Ministry of Healing*: "The well-being of society, the success of the church, the prosperity of the nation, depend upon home influences."¹

The central theme of the Households of Faiths study² expressed how essential relationships are to practicing Christians who engage in thoughtful and transformative conversations about faith.

A previous study by the Barna Group,³ conducted with 1,714 U.S. adults in 2017, revealed that most people are reluctant to talk about their faith. Some feel it is personal and private, some believe it's improper, some believe it may make them sound judgmental, and others simply are not

interested in talking about faith. Consequently, many Christians have relegated conversations of a spiritual nature to the private sphere and usually only with people they already have an established relationship with, preferably with family members and close friends. This research underscores the power of intimacy in faith formation; in other words, people are more inclined to discuss their spirituality with those who they trust and know well.

Let's look at some other key findings of the 2018 Households of Faith study.

THE PRESENCE OF CHILDREN/MINORS CATALYZES SPIRITUAL VIBRANCY

As Jesus said: "Let the little children come to me" (Matthew 19:14).⁴ When there are children present there is a sense of curiosity and wonder, which leads to greater opportunities to share faith and have meaningful and spiritual conversations. On the contrary, homes without minors have less give and take. Family members are more independent; therefore, interaction needs to be fostered with the intention to have real conversations and quality time for faith engagement.

FAITH FORMATION IS CONNECTED TO AND INCREASES WITH HOSPITALITY

Hospitality is the key indicator of a spiritually vibrant home. When people come together, conversations happen, ideas are exchanged, knowledge shared, and therefore it is the ideal place to share Jesus and His blessings with each other. That can sometimes be a challenge for couple households like empty nesters. They live more secluded lifestyles where meaningful exchanges happen between the spouses but rarely with anyone else. With intentional hospitable activities, these homes can become more vibrant. Another group that struggles with spiritual vibrancy are young unmarried adults that are living together, usually as housemates. They have more sporadic spiritual interactions, even if their homes are hospitable. Regardless of context and/or season in life, a spiritually vibrant home can be nurtured.

SPIRITUALLY VIBRANT HOMES ARE CHARACTERIZED BY FUN AND QUALITY TIME

People in these homes have meals together, share chores, play games, and sing together. They play sports and enjoy each other's company by doing common household activities. They carve out time for faith interactions, such as family worship, prayer, and Bible reading time. There is even vibrancy in their nonspiritual discussions.

FAITH HERITAGE IMPACTS CHRISTIAN BELIEFS AND PRACTICES FOR THE LONG TERM

Passed-down faith is good when there is a warm and emotional connection to the church. Spiritual struggle or wrestling with faith can also be a catalyst for faith development. Especially when it can be merged with positive memories of a church.

Let's take another look at what a spiritually vibrant home looks like.

Spiritually vibrant homes have meaningful quality time with their family members and housemates in addition to people from outside of the household. Family dinners, fun-filled activities, such as playing games, singing, sports activities, and reading books are a regular part of their lives. These families differ from devotional and hospitable households in that they combine both devotional and hospitable attributes. They are intentional about sharing such faith activities as family worship, prayer, and reading the Bible. They talk about feelings and have spiritual conversations; they engage in intentional spiritual coaching. Spiritual coaches look for opportunities to have reverent moments with individual household members; they share about God's forgiveness, discuss the Bible, maintain faith traditions of the family, and may also encourage church attendance.

WHAT DO OUR HOMES LOOK LIKE?

In 1990, 2000, and 2010 ValueGenesis Research studied the faith and values of young people attending Seventh-day Adventist high schools in North America. They looked at three aspects of teen life: family, school, and church. The ValueGenesis² research revealed good news about the family in that approximately two thirds of the teen respondents reported their family life to be happy, loving, supportive, and warm, which is a slight increase from ValueGenesis¹. These statistics are very important in that they continue to emerge as key predictors of spiritual maturity and long-term denominational loyalty.

WHY DO MEMBERS BECOME INACTIVE OR LEAVE THE CHURCH?

In 2014 the Office of Archives, Statistics, and Research (ASTR) at the General Conference conducted a research study on former and inactive church members. This research was called Leaving the Church study. In this study 48.9 percent of all participants were members for five years or fewer, 18.3 percent were members for six to 10 years, 12.3 percent were members for 11 to 15 years, and 20.4 percent were members for 16 or more years. When asked for their primary reason for leaving the church, 38 percent of the respondents reported marriage and family issues as primary conflict issues, 33.6 percent reported the death of parents, and 4.3 percent the death of other family members. Another 20 percent reported conflict in the church or conflict with other church members as a reason for leaving the church. More than half of those leaving the church reported relationship issues as primary triggers. A majority (82 percent) of all respondents reported

attending church at least once or twice a week, with 36.2 percent attending more than once a week and 45.8 percent attending only on Sabbath. Less than half (41.9 percent) reported their level of engagement in church life as just an observer, and a quarter (25.7 percent) as a participant. More than half (63.6 percent) claimed to be involved in spiritual activities, such as family worship daily or one to three times a week. More than half (62.4 percent) prayed daily, and almost three quarters (72.1 percent) had personal Bible study daily or one to three times a week. When asked if they are open to reconnecting to the Seventh-day Adventist Church, 63.8 percent reported they are likely or somewhat likely to be contacted.

The study also revealed that 24 percent of inactive members had just drifted away without a specific reason. The young adults with 63.5 percent are the largest group of people who stopped attending church. The second-largest group with 35.1 percent is the middle-aged generation.

These specific ages indicate times of transitions in people’s lives. The young adults are leaving home, graduating from college, living alone, getting married, and having children. The middle-aged members are becoming empty nesters and are looking for a new purpose in life after their children have gone to college.

Profile of Members Who Left SDA Church

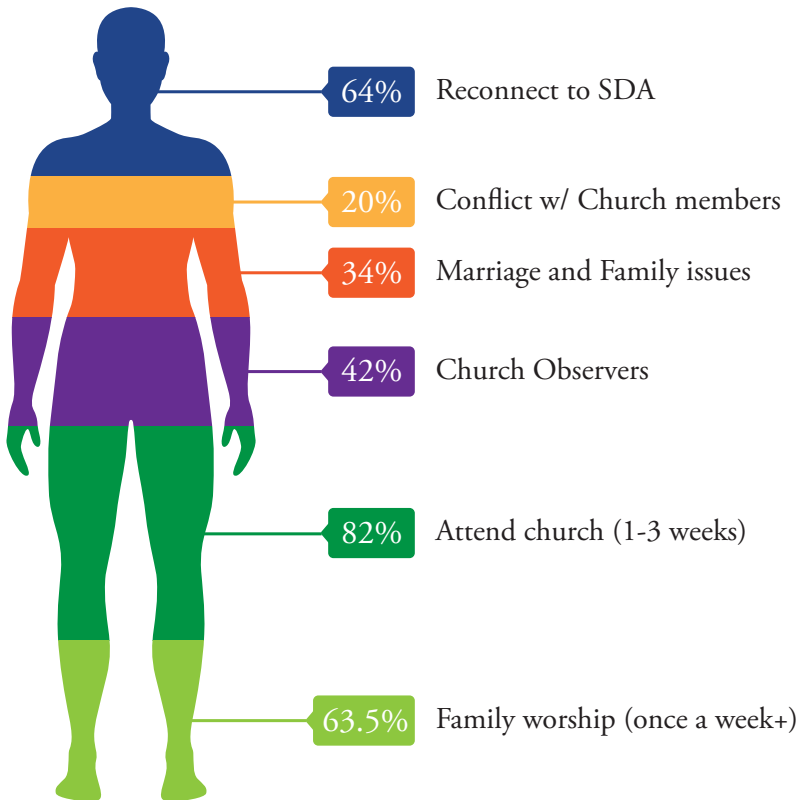


Figure 2. ASTR Study 2014 *Leaving the Church*, n=415

Roger Dudley stated the following in the book *Why Our Teenagers Leave the Church*: “The reasons for dropping out of the church seem to be highly interrelated. Those who choose to disconnect perceive the church as irrelevant because they sense they are unaccepted, and their needs are neglected. They also feel unaccepted because they don’t discern their church as attempting to provide them with relevant and targeted programming. The inconvenience of waking up early on Sabbath morning is another indicator that the church is oblivious to the reality of their lives. This combined with various personal issues and a very high distaste and disappointment with perceived intolerance, hypocrisy, and condemnation have estranged young adults from their church.”⁵

The statement shows the church is very negatively perceived by the young people who are deciding to stop attending church. How can this negative perception be changed?

How can a spiritually vibrant Adventist home help with the nurture and retention of church members, especially with the retention of the young adults and the group of the middle-aged?

The creation of a warm and fun-filled environment has a great impact on building meaningful relationships with members inside and outside the family. It will bring family members and friends closer and give them opportunities to share conversations about real-life problems and faith experiences. Such will help grow faith and help provide a feeling of being valued and included. When families open their homes to others in the church, they create unique opportunities to show love and inclusiveness. These opportunities can help people at risk of leaving the church to feel valued. Newly converted friends that are included in family worship and faith conversations will experience spiritual practices that they may not have learned growing up and can help them to become active members in the church.

In the book *Valuegenesis: Faith in the Balance*, Roger Dudley underscores the importance of frequent family worship by stating: “Family worship seems to be a significant factor in helping youth develop a deep, rich, life-changing faith. It is interesting that something as simple to do as regular family devotions could be so helpful. Think what might happen if this family activity were reinstated in each household?”⁶

Age-appropriate family worship that is interesting, thoughtful, and applicable in combination with true examples of hospitality is the key to the retention of our children in the church. Creating warm and meaningful memories in connection to church life is a key component for nurture and retention.

Spiritual coaching can provide opportunities for real-life talk inside the family or with church friends in the privacy of the home. It can show the power of faith in an intentional caring, nonjudgmental environment. Honesty about feelings of hurt or guilt, disappointments, loneliness, and forgiveness can improve relationships and heal broken relationships.

Empty nesters could become family sponsors and provide spiritual coaching for teenagers in the church or families with young children.

Becoming a family sponsor or host for Spiritual Leadership in the Home studies will help other parents to become spiritual coaches. Giving parents practical tips for how to lead their family in Bible reading, faith-based conversations, and prayer; teaching them how to apply the Bible in

their everyday interactions with their kids by practicing love, forgiveness, and caring for each other; and also how to create opportunities to discuss biblical principles will enhance their everyday life and spiritual development.

Spiritual coaching can help families deal with family problems and therefore help with nurturing and retention of church members.

In the following verses the Bible shares knowledge about how to connect with and treat others:

“These commandments that I give you today are to be on your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up” (Deuteronomy 6:6, 7).

“A new command I give you: Love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another” (John 13:34, 35).

“Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing” (1 Thessalonians 5:11).

“Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling” (1 Peter 4:9).

Let us take these words of wisdom to heart and focus on the people around us. When we teach our children about the Bible and how to develop a relationship with Jesus, our faith will also be strengthened. When we open our homes and are hospitable, we create opportunities to share with others what Jesus has done for us. When we support and encourage others, we build relationships and may even become friends. Then our homes will be vibrant homes that will impact the people around us, and we can see God working in each other’s lives.

Proverbs 24:3, 4 says: “By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established; through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures.”

May the information presented impart wisdom and understanding to produce spiritually vibrant disciples of Jesus Christ, spiritually vibrant Adventist Homes, and spiritually vibrant churches. Let us lead by example so that faith that is sustainable will develop and can be passed down to the next generation.

“Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32).

“And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds” (Hebrews 10:24).

ENDNOTES

- ¹ Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1905), p. 349.
- ² Barna Resources, *Households of Faith* (2018), available at: <https://shop.barna.com/products/households-of-faith>, accessed Nov. 25, 2019.
- ³ Barna Group, *Spiritual Conversations in the Digital Age—Barna Group* (2017), available at <https://www.barna.com/spiritualconversations>, accessed Nov. 25, 2019.
- ⁴ Bible texts in this article are from the New International Version.
- ⁵ Roger L. Dudley, *Why Our Teenagers Are Leaving the Church* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2000), p. 66.
- ⁶ Roger L. Dudley and V. Bailey Gillespie, *Valuegenesis: Faith in the Balance* (Riverside, Calif.: La Sierra University Press, 1992).

I FEEL LIKE GIVING HIM A PIECE OF MY MIND!

BY WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

QUESTION

Next month is our sixth anniversary, which has me evaluating the quality of my marriage. My husband is a good guy, but he keeps repeating the same mistakes. Sometimes I think he's probably retarded or simply doesn't get me. When I say "mistakes" I don't mean that he is cheating on me or anything like that. It's more like not paying attention to the things I keep asking him to take care of around the house, or the things I need him to do for me that let me know I am special to him. Sometimes I just feel like yelling at him or telling him off, and honestly I do sometimes, but nothing seems to work. Please help! I feel like I am going to lose my mind or simply quit being interested in my marriage, which scares me, since we have a daughter and I want better for her than I grew up with.

ANSWER

Most relationships that end up in marriage experience a measure of excitement and euphoria during the early days after meeting and falling in love. It is a space of fantasy and ecstatic joy felt when you are hanging out together with another human being. The hugging and kissing, and sometimes more, does a number on your head that makes you feel like you've hit the jackpot, and you hear yourself saying, "we have soooo much in common," when all you are really saying is how you feel when you are the middle of those experiences.

Willie Oliver, PhD, CFLE and **Elaine Oliver**, PhDc, LCPC, CFLE
are Directors of the Department of Family Ministries at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
World Headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, USA.

The feelings of joy, elations, delight and unexplained bliss emerge in these situations. This makes sense because everybody needs to feel wanted, cared for, and that they are special to someone else. Your relationship will continue to skyrocket, fueled mostly by hormones naturally produced by your bodies. You can create a real high when you are together.

Alright, we know, you are way past those feelings. We are hearing you say you are always feeling mad these days because of your husband's lack of attention to your lives together. You probably feel like yelling, screaming, and giving him a piece of your mind so he can straighten up and fly right. And you are at the place where you are now asking yourself what happened to the dude who brought you flowers, always remembered your birthday—well there was probably only one of those before you got married—and made you feel like a queen? These days you are probably feeling more like his mother and his maid. Are we tracking so far?

Well, before you give up on your marriage, we want to invite you to go back and explore what about your husband made you want to marry him? Is he still fundamentally the same person you committed to? Your answers are probably yes. But now life has become more complicated and involved. You both need to develop greater patience for each other. You both need to be deliberate about injecting kindness and understanding into your marriage—lots of it—to give yourselves added currency and fuel for the journey ahead, right? You may also need to remind yourself at this juncture that you married an imperfect human being, and you must reframe the way you look at your marriage to remain sane and engaged.

Though frustrated at times, giving him a piece of your mind won't solve your dilemma or improve the quality of your marriage. Rather, we encourage you to engage your husband in calm and civil conversation by listening first and talking second. Invite him to share his dreams and needs with you, and ask him what it is that he needs from you to make him feel loved. It's true he might get suspicious and think you are up to something. However, assure him you are simply attempting to be a better wife by creating a more pleasant living environment in your home.

Remember, you can't control or change your husband, you can only control your response. And by creating a more positive atmosphere in your home, the likelihood is pretty high that you will influence your husband to be more engaged and interested in what you are saying. Of course, if after trying this method for a while you are unhappy with the results, find a good Christian counselor who may help you both come to grips with the real needs of your marriage at this time.

We encourage you with the words from the Bible in Colossians 3:12-14 that state: "Therefore, as the elect of God, holy and beloved, put on tender mercies, kindness, humility, meekness, longsuffering; bearing with one another, and forgiving one another, if anyone has a complaint against another; even as Christ forgave you, so you also must do. But above all these things put love, which is the bond of perfection."

You and your husband will continue in our prayers.

VACCINATED YET? SO WHAT?

BY WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

WHAT IS THE RIGHT ATTITUDE TO VACCINATION?

To be or not to be, that is the question—a line from what is probably the most famous monologue of Shakespeare’s Hamlet, Prince of Denmark. Quite possibly the most famous soliloquy—an erudite way of saying speech—in English literature.

THE CURRENT QUESTION

Someone has noted that the twenty-first-century parallel to Shakespeare’s illustrious words is *To code or not to code, that is the challenge*. Yet in 2021—more than 400 years from Shakespeare’s times—the most agonizing conversation people seem to be having with themselves and others in the middle of an atrocious world pandemic is *To get vaccinated or not, that is the question*. More than a year since the discovery of SARS-CoV-2—the strain of coronavirus that causes COVID-19—the world has experienced in excess of 3 million deaths globally, and close to 600,000 deaths in the United States. Still, there is apparently no end in sight for many countries—even among the most advanced economies—despite the arrival of several vaccines claiming to be our way back to some semblance of the normalcy we were experiencing in the prepandemic world.

To be sure, COVID-19 vaccines are a hot topic of conversation these days. Particularly fascinating is watching and listening to the different opinions about the virtues or disadvantages of getting or not getting a vaccine. An apparent reason the competing voices are so many and so loud

Willie Oliver, PhD, CFLE and **Elaine Oliver**, PhD, LCPC, CFLE
are Directors of the Department of Family Ministries at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
World Headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, USA.

may have to do—in part—with the wonder, spectacle, and sensation that vaccines were produced so quickly and effectively or not, depending on who’s talking or doing the analysis.

STATS AND STANDS ON THE QUESTION

In the United States, President Joe Biden, soon after he came into office on January 20, 2021, announced his plan to vaccinate 1 million persons per day in the first 100 days of his presidential term. Then on April 21, 2021, he stated that the nation was headed for administering 200 million COVID-19 vaccines by his ninety-second day in office—double his initial promise and in a shorter time. The president exhorted employers across the country to offer paid time off for their workers to get their vaccines as part of the effort to increase vaccination rates. As vaccination rates quickened during subsequent weeks, and with the availability of vaccines beginning to be higher than the demand, the president announced new tax incentives for small- and medium-sized businesses to offer time off from work so their employees might receive their vaccinations and be able to recover, in the event of any side effects from the vaccinations.¹

Somewhat paradoxically, demand for COVID-19 vaccines started declining, despite the fact that every American adult was now eligible to get one, and at a time when half of all eligible Americans had gotten at least one dose of the vaccine.

We feel much better having taken the vaccine than if we were still waiting to get one.

On top of these factors vaccine hesitancy, a reluctance to take the vaccine, was observed, mostly in states in the Deep South. Besides such reservation, millions of Americans chose not to sign up to get their vaccines for a number of other reasons, including not caring for the trouble of finding an appointment online, or preferring to wait for additional research findings on the long-term side effects of the vaccines.²

The irony of living on Planet Earth is that while one group of people debates whether or not to avail themselves of a product or services that may enhance, protect or prolong life, another group is without access or has limited access to the same or similar goods. Such has been the case with vaccines during this global pandemic. Worthy of note is that as of February 19, 2021, about 90 countries had access to at least one COVID-19 vaccine. At that point 10 countries that make up 60 percent of the global gross domestic product had dispensed 75 percent of all COVID-19 vaccines. At the same time, Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, World Health Organization director-general, and Henrietta Fore, UNICEF executive director, informed that some 130 countries, with a total population of 2.5 billion, were yet to give out a single dose.³

Anyone wondering what the official position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church might be on vaccines in general, and COVID-19 vaccines specifically, may take note of an article in the December 18, 2020, edition of the *Adventist Review* entitled “COVID-19 Vaccines: Addressing Concerns, Offering Counsel.”⁴ The church’s official declaration on immunization “places strong

emphasis on health and well-being. The Adventist health emphasis is based on biblical revelation, the inspired writings of E. G. White (cofounder of the church), and on peer-reviewed scientific literature.” A “responsible” attitude to immunization/vaccination is urged, advising that “no religious or faith-based reason” exists for avoiding “protective and preventive immunization programs.” The statement goes on to emphasize both the importance of community health and of individual conscience: “We value the health and safety of the population, which includes the maintenance of ‘herd immunity.’ We are not the conscience of the individual church member, and recognize individual choices. These are exercised by the individual. The choice not to be immunized is not and should not be seen as dogma nor the doctrine of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.”⁵

OPPOSITION TO THE QUESTION

Despite the continuing research of the Centers for Disease Control (CDC) in the United States, and despite the church’s clear counsel on the issue of vaccines in general and COVID-19 vaccines in particular, zealous monologues, passionate speeches, and energetic, fervent, and furious diatribes continue to be heard against vaccination. The CDC response to questions on the safety of the COVID-19 vaccines is firm: “Millions of people have safely received a COVID-19 vaccine. More than 52 million doses of COVID-19 vaccines were administered in the United States from December 14, 2020, through February 14, 2021. COVID-19 vaccines are safe and effective” (April 13, 2021).⁶

And to a question, specifically about how effective the Moderna COVID-19 vaccine is, the CDC replied: “Based on evidence from clinical trials, the Moderna vaccine was 94.1 percent effective at preventing laboratory-confirmed COVID-19 illness in people who received two doses who had no evidence on being previously infected” (April 5, 2021).⁷

OUR PERSONAL RESPONSE TO THE QUESTION

For ourselves, we willingly share our personal testimony in relation to the questions in our title Question 1: “Vaccinated yet?” We answer, “Yes!” We both received our second dose of the Moderna vaccine in mid-February 2021, and except for mild flulike symptoms experienced by Elaine for about half a day after the booster shot, we experienced no signs of maladies and have remained COVID-19 free.

To the second question posed by our title, “So what?” our answer is that we feel much better having taken the vaccine than if we were still waiting to get one. What’s even better is that for the first time in more than a year we have been able to join loved ones, also vaccinated, for brunch at a favorite restaurant, and to exchange those warm hugs we had gone without for more than a year.

As the pandemic continues, we earnestly pray for greater compassion from the international community, especially the world’s strongest economies, toward countries with much weaker economies and capacity to acquire vaccines for their populations. Our prayers will also continue to ascend to God for His providential intervention.

Living in the United States where millions in the population have still not received a vaccine, we continue to follow the best scientific advice on mask wearing, social distancing, and hand washing. We will also persist in other practices that are always good: eating healthy foods, drinking lots of water, exercising regularly, communing with God daily, and aiming for seven to eight hours of sleep each night. In addition, we will go on being fortified every day by ideal counsel from Scripture: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 4:6, 7, NIV).

NOTES

¹ <https://apple.news/AWh3q5Wk2SwKYonrvD4EdEw?>

² <https://apple.news/AbrJ8sqytRvWm4sYAYWI0ug>

³ <https://rdcu.be/cjb28>

⁴ <https://www.adventistreview.org/church-news/story15816-covid-19-vaccines-addressing-concerns,-offering-counsel>

⁵ <https://www.adventist.org/guidelines/immunization/>

⁶ <https://www.cdc.gov>

⁷ <https://www.cdc.gov>

LET'S NOT WASTE THE PANDEMIC

BY WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

One year into our current world health crisis,
it may be the time to ask “what,” not “why.”

It's hard to believe that it's been a year that the world as we knew it literally came to a screeching halt. It still seems surreal. Millions of people sheltered in place, hoping and believing that if we all did our part, life would be back to normal in just a few weeks.

In an October 2020 report, *Stress in America™ 2020: A National Mental Health Crisis*, the American Psychological Association issued a warning about the impact of pandemic stress on long-term physical and mental health. Surveys revealed that many Americans have seen, and will continue to see, declining physical and mental health due to their inability to cope with the stresses of the pandemic. Many will experience long-term consequences such as chronic illness, depression, anxiety, and substance abuse. In addition, during the pandemic, young adults ages 18-30 have been most susceptible to suicide and suicidal thoughts. At least one in four have considered killing themselves in the past 30 days.

These statistics are very daunting and discouraging. Some of us may be asking, “God, why?” Perhaps some are even thinking that God is punishing us. In therapy, we often encourage clients to ask “what” rather than “why.” The truth is, there isn't always an answer to why (although you may be insisting there is), but asking *what* reveals a level of self-awareness that helps the client to participate in their healing and to moving forward. As we Christians reflect on this past year

Willie Oliver, PhD, CFLE and **Elaine Oliver**, PhDc, LCPC, CFLE
are Directors of the Department of Family Ministries at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists
World Headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, USA.

of living with the COVID-19 pandemic, perhaps we would benefit from asking a few “what” questions.

Here's one: What have we learned about ourselves, about each other, about God, and His ultimate plan for our lives? Here are some of our takeaways:

1. Faith in God is a huge blessing. The secular mind questions the logic of faith. However, when one is in the middle of a pandemic, logic provides no solace. Believing in the One who can calm the storm and comfort our fears is rational and transcendent. “Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus” (**Phil. 4:6, 7**, NLT).

2. Cherish family and loved ones daily. We've heard these words over and over again, but after a year of social distancing, separation from loved ones, and a myriad Zoom funerals, perhaps it resonates now more than ever. As of mid-March 2021, 2.6 million people had died around the world in one year. We knew these people: they were our family members, friends, co-workers, neighbors, grocery store clerks, nurses, teachers, doctors. May they rest in peace. But for those who remain, look out for them, reach out to them, call them, pray with them, hug those that you can hug. (Note: If you suspect someone you know is considering suicide, help them get assistance immediately: **#COVID19MHI**).

3. The human spirit is resilient. Resilience has become the axiom of this past year. It means having the capacity to adapt well and recover from adversity and difficulties. Who would have imagined that one year later, we would still be practicing social distancing, communicating virtually, wearing masks regularly (albeit grudgingly), navigating life in a seemingly new normal? We are stronger than we know, and better together.

4. We are on a mission. Despite the science and all we know about the coronavirus, so much is still unknown and seemingly arbitrary. For instance, why does an 83-year old woman with pre-existing conditions survive after contracting COVID, but a 35-year-old mom of two succumbs to it? So far, no answers are forthcoming to these “why” questions. However, if we ask “what,” it pushes us into a deeper understanding of God's purpose for us while we remain here on earth. Do we need to do more justice, love more mercy, feed more hungry people, speak up more for the voiceless and the marginalized, walk more humbly?

None of us knows what the long-term effect or residual effects will be from this pandemic. To be sure, research studies will continue to reveal more damage. However, we do know that Jesus is coming soon. Let's not waste the pandemic. Maybe God needs us to see each other more clearly, to trust Him more dearly, and to shine His light more brightly in a world that will continue to grow dark as we await His return. He promises a crown of beauty for ashes, and joy in the morning. Plan to get yours.

TELL ME HOW, TELL ME WHY

BY STEPHEN BAUER

A father mourns the loss of his son

In the wee hours of the morning on January 4, 2021, our vibrant, apparently healthy 35-year-old son, Andrew, unexpectedly died in his sleep. He was a successful corporate attorney who exuded a vibrant spiritual life, was an elder in his church, and was passionate about personal evangelistic outreach. Even though I am a pastor and theologian, I find that the spiritual shock and crisis of faith that accompany such a tragedy are real and palpable. My son's untimely death makes absolutely no sense to me. This manuscript is an expression of my grappling with this devastating event.—Author.

How does a father comprehend the idea that his son, who appeared to be the epitome of health and vigor, has been snatched from himself and his wife by death? Just a week before his passing, I was with him in his basement workshop helping him construct a new mantel to hang over his woodstove. *How can this be?* I entered that same workshop hours after his death to retrieve a screwdriver, and there sat the mantel, sanded and ready for stain, with the French cleat clamped in place for the glue to set, clamps still clamping, waiting for its maker to come finish its crafting. The unfinished mantel spoke to me about the unfinished life of my son.

My difficulty grasping his passing comes, in part, from living with the privileges of modern society. A century or more ago parents frequently buried their children, but advances in medicine and sanitary living conditions have wonderfully changed the odds; we now expect the norm to be that we outlive our children. So the loss of Andrew brings massive questions:

Why?

Stephen Bauer, PhD, is a professor of theology at Southern Adventist University, Collegedale, Tennessee, in the United States.

Will we ever know what caused his premature passing?

How can God permit such a spiritual, dedicated, ministry-minded young man to suddenly be plucked from our lives without warning?

It is so unfair! He did not deserve this!!!

STRUGGLING TO FIND ANSWERS

Some would answer that it was God's will that Andrew pass away now. This semi-fatalistic view that "God willed it" seeks to insulate us from our fear of chaos and unpredictability. I have difficulty with this perspective, however. The God of the Bible whom I know does not perform evil that good may come. Even God's own apostle Paul rejected the idea that doing evil to accomplish something good is a morally acceptable option (see Rom. 3:8).

Another temptation is to blame Satan for striking Andrew to thwart his service for God in this world. Andrew and I had drawn very close to each other in spiritual things. His passion to lead others to know the God he loved and served knit well with my own pastoral heart. I have lost my spiritual comrade and friend, whose walk with God strengthened me. Satan may be displeased, but he is *not* an alternate deity. The biblical book of Job declares that God sets limits on the evil that Satan can do in this world.

In trying to make similar sense of the seeming vanity and chaos of life, Solomon lamented: "I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, *but time and chance happen to them all*" (Eccl. 9:11, ESV; emphasis supplied).^{*} Time and chance. I do not like chance. Why are we subject to chance?

In Eden, Adam and Eve rejected their God-created limits and position as creatures under divine sovereignty. As a redemptive move, God responded by significantly increasing their limitations to help them see that their life and existence depend on a God bigger and wiser than themselves. As a result, they would now live in a world in which random and unpredictable calamities impact all humans—good and bad—with all ultimately being subject to death. Even if I were the world's richest man or the earth's most powerful politician, I would still be powerless to save and restore my son from death. No one escapes facing death. As such, life in such a world is not fair, but then, why should one care about the fairness of this life if there is nothing beyond it but nonexistence? Our moral sensibilities demand some kind of eternal destiny in which the moral quality of one's way of life actually matters.

GOD'S SOVEREIGN RULE

While God does not do evil to accomplish good, he does work *in* those tragedies and disasters to bring about good for those who love him (see Rom. 8:28). Such heartbreaks and concerns for fairness become God's instruments that confront you and me with our powerlessness and our need for a loving God bigger and more powerful than our finite selves. The good news is that this earthly bubble of chaos in which we presently live is bounded and surrounded by God's

sovereign rule. Andrew's death is beyond our control, highlighting our helplessness and beckoning us to call out to his God in faith and dependence.

Years ago, as a flight instructor, I had a student practicing full-power stalls as part of training for emergencies. In this maneuver, the aircraft will easily enter a spin if your rudder is not right. To qualify as an instructor, I had learned to perform triple-rotation spins. Since my student was not seeing his need for instruction in this maneuver, I stayed quiet and let him put us into a hard-left spin, but I did *not* let the aircraft get outside *my* control. All I needed to do was say "my airplane," take the controls, and recover the aircraft. It was a key instructional moment.

In like manner, Andrew, while sleeping in death, remains surrounded, not by coldness and despair, but by God's loving sovereignty. While it is beyond our capacity to restore Andrew to life, he is not beyond the reach of God's re-creative power. At present, our hearts and our world have entered into a spin of devastation and grief that are beyond our control. Someday very soon, however, God is going to say, "My airplane" and take the controls of our world and recover it. Then, as foretold in Daniel 2—a prophecy that Andrew loved—God's kingdom will come without human assistance, wiping away all the chaotic kingdoms of the world. God will then wipe away our tears and build his own kingdom based on the principles of self-sacrificial love, as demonstrated in His gift of Christ. Like his mantel, then, Andrew and his unfinished life lie silently asleep in God's basement workshop, awaiting the call of his Maker to everlasting life in newfound glory and completeness. Our pain and darkness call us to walk with God as Andrew did so we, too, may experience that final transformation from mortal to immortal at the last trumpet.

AWAITING JESUS' RETURN

Until that great day, those who love Andrew sit in the darkness and black hole of grief and pain, in the valley of the shadow of death. In our darkness, the voice of God speaks through the prophet Micah: "*Rejoice not over me, O my enemy; when I fall, I shall rise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord will be a light to me*" (Micah 7:8, ESV).

For now I, along with every member of Andrew's family and his friends, sit in the deepest darkness. I will sorely miss our spiritual comradery. I will miss discussing his sermon preparations with him. I will miss the phone calls seeking help on how to use a certain tool or do a certain project. I will miss learning about his latest reading and research. I will greatly miss his visits to our home and his cheerful help with hard work around our house. I will miss his intellect and humor. I will cherish the precious gift of my daughter-in-law, whom he brought into our family. He was my beloved son, with whom I am very well pleased!

Oh, God, I sit in darkness. Be my light, right now. Oh God, we sit in darkness. Be our light, right now. Help us to find the same light that lit Andrew's life with joy, meaning, and purpose. Amen.

* Scripture quotations marked ESV are from The Holy Bible, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

PRAYERS ON THE FLOOR

BY STEPHEN BAUER

God's silence does not mean He does not care.

Losing your child to death is one of the greatest traumas in human experience. It strikes your psyche and soul with a raw and savage force that cannot be adequately expressed. In my journey, the trauma surpassed my emotional capacity to process it, often causing emotional numbness that made it virtually impossible to weep. I kept asking myself, “What is wrong with me?”

In addition to emotional confusion, an unexpected impact of being sledge-hammered by such grief was its impact on my spiritual life. In previous crises, including the deaths of our parents, my walk with God was an asset helping to carry me through the distress. Losing our son in the prime of his life, however, wreaked havoc on my spiritual experience. I would read my Bible seeking comfort and strength, but the passages I perused seemed to be lifeless words on screen or paper. I would pray and my prayers lacked the energy to even rise toward the ceiling. They just fell powerless to the floor. I had *zero* sense of God's presence or support. The book of Job aptly depicts this experience: “Behold, I go forward, but he is not there, and backward, but I do not perceive him; on the left hand when he is working, I do not behold him; he turns to the right hand, but I do not see him” (Job 23:8, 9).^{*} My heart was screaming, “Where are you God?” yet I heard no answering voice.

About a week after the memorial service, as a raw act of the will I decided to honor the memory of my son by adopting an ambitious Bible-reading program he had just started. The plan consists of reading 10 chapters a day for 500 days. The program consists of 10 sequences that run

Stephen Bauer, PhD, is a professor of theology at Southern Adventist University, Collegedale, Tennessee, in the United States.

simultaneously yet of differing lengths (four gospels every three months, Proverbs every month, etc.). One sequence started with *Job*. I was NOT in the mood for *Job*. I did not think I could face the grief and verbosity I knew to be in that book. Unlike his father, who is happier to put off unpleasant tasks, Andrew would have faced it head-on. So, summoning up my inner Andrew, I set into reading the *Job* sequence with the other nine.

I was surprised by my experience in *Job*. *Job*'s emotional openness helped me puncture some of the emotional numbness I was in, enabling me to more honestly face my feelings. It was not until I reached *Job* 12:1, however, that I noticed *Job* lash out at his friends for the first time. *Job* blasts his "friends" in the ensuing chapters, calling them "worthless physicians" (*Job* 13:4) who "whitewash with lies" (*ibid.*), imploring them to be silent (verses 5, 6). He angrily tells them they are "miserable comforters" (*Job* 16:1) and continues to chastise them in nearly every ensuing discourse.

I stopped to ponder what I had been reading. *Job*'s friends started well. They sat with *Job* in empathetic shock and silence for seven days, waiting for *Job* to speak first. They were magnificent! . . . until they started talking. Instead of perceiving the emotive cry of *Job*'s heart, however, they thought they heard bad theology and sought to straighten out his thinking. *Job* was fed up with them because by shifting from empathy to explanation and exhortation, they were utterly missing the emotive message of his cries. I can resonate with *Job* in noting that especially in the early shock of grief, quiet empathy is far more helpful than attempted explanations or exhortations.

As I ruminated on this while progressing through the daily readings, the thought hit me that the silence I was feeling from God was not abandonment but divine empathy. Like *Job*'s friends, God is silently sitting with me in the shock, horror, and numbness. Unlike them, however, He knows when to stay quiet. As I pondered this, I began to realize something even more profound. I realized that God is not so much sitting with me in empathetic silence, but that He is actually functioning as the floor under my feet to hold me up because I am unable to stand in my own strength under this grief. What this means, then, is that my prayers do not need to ascend to a God "up there." They do not even need to reach the ceiling over my head. When my spiritually depleted prayers fall to the floor, they are taking the shortest, most efficient path to the God who is under my feet holding me up in silent empathy. Even though I cannot feel Him, even though I feel numb, dark, and spiritually void, I can choose to trust that the God under my feet is catching my prayers as they fall to the floor, and that He is answering them in ways I cannot grasp.

The same God that I am finding under my feet, even in His silence, can also be the God under your feet. When you feel crushed by grief and despair; when you feel emotionally numb and spiritually dead and unable to discern God in your life, then let your prayers fall to the floor and into the hands of the empathetic God under our feet, the God who quietly feels our horror with us, and who silently continues to keep us standing.

* Scripture quotations are from *The Holy Bible*, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

RESOURCES

— The Seventh-day Adventist Church
is constantly creating materials to
empower you.

LIVING FRUITFUL LOVE

BY WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

Review and Herald® Publishing Association

July, 2021

26 pages

The Bible speaks about another kind of fruit that is not bought at the market or cultivated at the orchard or farm. In the book of Galatians, the Apostle Paul uses fruit to show what will happen to us when we choose to be filled with the Spirit of Jesus. The fruit of the Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control are virtues that are cultivated when we are filled with the Spirit of Jesus in our hearts. It is the result of having a relationship with Jesus and allowing His Spirit to flow in us and through us.



Digital download at family.adventist.org

CONNECTED: DEVOTIONAL READINGS FOR AN INTIMATE MARRIAGE

BY WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

The Stanbrough Press Ltd., 2020

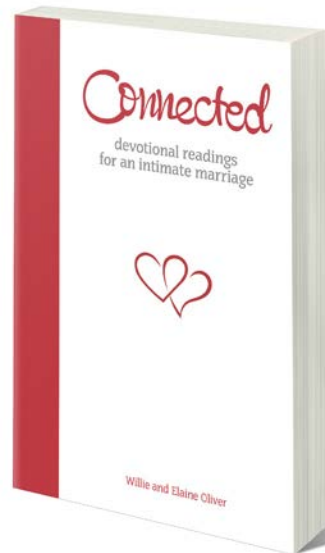
162 pages

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

In *Connected: devotional readings for an intimate marriage*, Willie and Elaine Oliver share over 35 years of marriage experience, growing together, learning from each other, and rearing children. They know how to make the 'what ifs' become reality.

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

Discover more within! Available at www.lifesourcebookshop.co.uk



COUPLE'S BIBLE

Safeliz, 2019

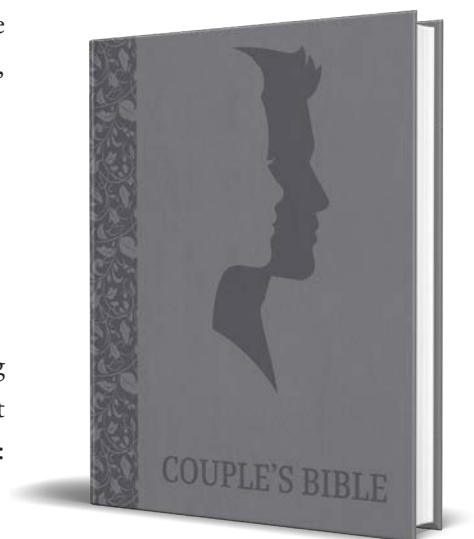
1,500 pages

The Couple's Bible is designed to help build and nurture relationships. There are more than 170 topics that are divided into five sections focusing on how to strengthen marriage, and parenting relationships, as well as how to overcome challenges that couples face. Special features include:

- Marriage in the Bible, Biblical Theology of the Family, Pillars Undergirding Family Ministries, Special Texts for Couples and more
- A special Bible course on home and family
- 101 Ideas for Family Evangelism
- Marriage vocabulary dictionary and maps
- And much more...

The Bible is available in several languages including English, Spanish and French and can be ordered at Adventist Book Centers throughout the world or by visiting:

www.safelizbibles.com



HOPE FOR TODAY'S FAMILIES

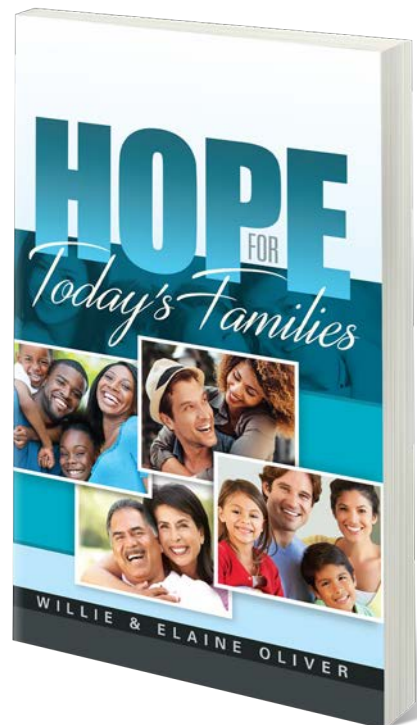
BY WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

Review and Herald Publishing Association, 2018

94 pages

The 2019 world missionary book of the year is still good to help strengthen marriages and families any time. It offers *Hope for Today's Families* using time-proven principles that will facilitate a meaningful and happy life.

Available in many languages at Adventist Book Centers worldwide or through your local publishing house.

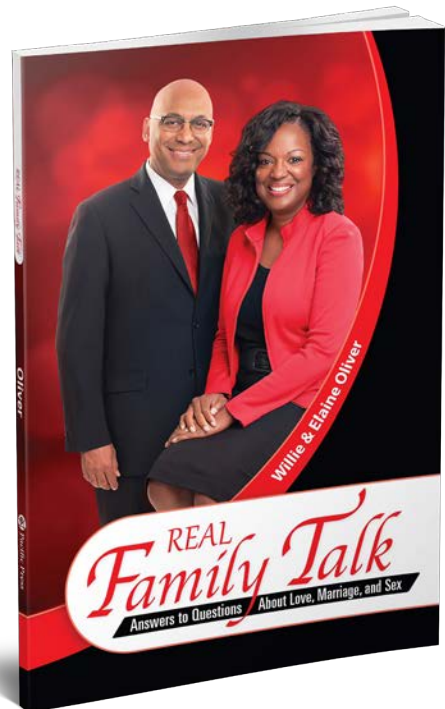


REAL FAMILY TALK: ANSWERS TO QUESTIONS ABOUT LOVE, MARRIAGE AND SEX

BY WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

Pacific Press® Publishing Association
Nampa, Idaho, 2015
127 pages

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



REAL FAMILY TALK

WITH WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

www.hopetv.org



Through engaging, informative, and spiritual discussions about issues facing today's families, *Real Family Talk* seeks to strengthen families and inspire hope. In each edition, the Olivers draw from their pastoral, educational, and counseling experience to navigate discussions about family life, approaching each topic with practical solutions and sound biblical principles.

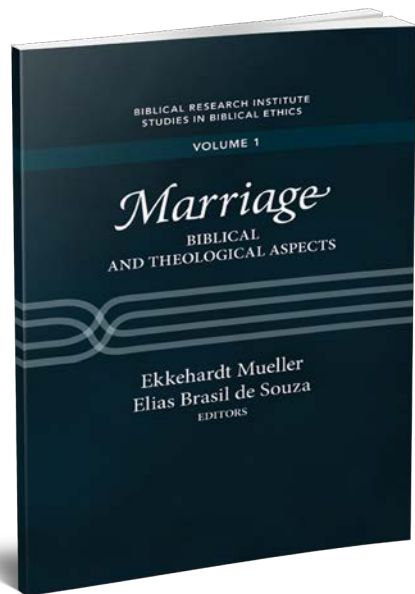
Access the show on your TV, computer, tablet or smartphone. Find current and previous episodes via the HopeTV App or visit www.hopetv.org

MARRIAGE: BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL ASPECTS, VOL. 1

EKKEHARDT MUELLER AND ELIAS BRASIL DE SOUZA, EDITORS

Biblical Research Institute. Review and Herald Publishing, 2015
290 pages

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



APPENDIX A FAMILY MINISTRIES IMPLEMENTATION

— Please use these documents as part of your work in Family Ministries. The contents are the result of working with families in our church around the world.

Note: Some of the recommendations listed in these forms will need to be adapted and modified to the specific needs and laws of the territories in which this resource is to be used.

DOWNLOADABLE MATERIAL

To download the Appendix A surveys and forms please visit our website: family.adventist.org/2022RB

A FAMILY MINISTRIES POLICY AND PURPOSE STATEMENT

The congregation and staff of the:

.....

Church are committed to providing a safe environment to help children learn to love and follow Jesus Christ. It is the purpose of this congregation to prevent any form of child abuse physical, emotional or sexual and to protect children and those who work with them.

Churches with programs for children are not insulated from those who abuse: therefore, this congregation believes that it is vitally important to take decisive steps to ensure that the church and its programs are safe, providing a joyful experience for children and youth. The following policies have been established and reflect our commitment to provide protective care of all children when they are attending any church sponsored activity.

- Volunteers who work with children and youth are required to be active members of this congregation for a minimum of six months, and must be approved by appropriate church personnel before they may begin working directly with children, unless there has been previous documented clearance.
- All NAD employees and NAD volunteers who regularly work with children must complete an application form (see NAD’s Children’s Ministries website: <https://www.childmin.org/childrens-safety>). References must be obtained from potential volunteers. Appropriate personnel or staff must check those references. Other divisions are encouraged to follow this procedure.
- All workers with children should observe the “two person” rule, which means that workers must avoid one-on-one situations with children whenever possible.

- Adult survivors of childhood physical or sexual abuse need the love and acceptance of the church family. Individuals with such a history must discuss their desire to work with children and youth with one of the staff in a confidential interview prior to receiving approval to work in these areas.
- Individuals who have committed physical or sexual abuse, whether or not convicted, may not work in church –sponsored activities or programs for children or youth.
- Opportunities for training in prevention and recognition of child abuse will be provided by the church. Workers will be expected to participate in such training.
- Workers should immediately report to the pastor or administration any behaviors or other incidents that seem abusive or inappropriate. Upon notification, appropriate actions will be taken and reports made in compliance with the operating procedure of these policies.
- Guidelines for volunteers who work with your and children will be provided to each volunteer.
- Children shall not be allowed to roam around the church without adult supervision. Parents are responsible for supervising their children before and after Sabbath School.
- No child should be released to use the restroom unless accompanied by a parent or older sibling.
- A responsible adult shall be designated to circulate in and around the church, including parking areas to provide security. This is critical when only one adult is present at some activities for minors, such as a Sabbath School division.
- Any discipline shall occur within the visual contact of another adult. All forms of corporal punishment are strictly prohibited.
- All meetings for children or youth must have the approval of the pastor and/or church board, especially overnight activities. Minors must have signed parental permission for each trip, including emergency medical treatment release.
- If there is a known sex offender attending a church, a deacon or other responsible adult shall be assigned to monitor the person while on the premises or at off-site church activity. The offender shall be informed of the procedure. If a sex offender transfers to or attends another church, the leadership of that church shall be notified.

THE FAMILY MINISTRIES LEADER

The family ministries leader designs a ministry to families that will meet the specific needs of the congregation and community. This section provides planning support for family ministries leaders. Planning is critical for ministering to the individuals and families in the congregation. Family ministries is also an excellent way to reach out to families in the community. The family ministries leader is a member of the local church board and integrates family ministries activities to the whole church program. Listed below are responsibilities and activities.

1. Develop and chair a small family ministries committee that reflects the distinctiveness of the congregation. It may include a single parent, young married persons, mid-life families, retired, widowed or divorced persons. People who serve on this committee should be carefully chosen as visionary people reflecting the grace of God.
2. Be a family advocate. Family ministries is not merely program-oriented, but must look at the whole church program with sensitivity to its impact on families. In some situations the family ministries leader may need to advocate for family time. In other words, there may be so many programs going on in a congregation that people have little time to live their own lives as families.
3. Survey family needs and interests in the congregation. The needs assessment survey and family profile sheet may be used to help determine the needs of the congregation.
4. Plan programs and activities for the year that may include video presentations, retreats or special speakers who present workshops and seminars. Plans should

- also include simple activities that may be suggested to families through the church bulletin or newsletter.
5. Work with the pastor and church board to be sure plans are included in the local church budget.
 6. Make use of the resources available from the conference family ministries department. These can save time, energy and serve to keep costs down for the local congregation. When planning for special presentations, the conference family ministries director is able to assist in finding interesting and qualified presenters.
 7. Communicate with the congregation. Family ministries should not be perceived simply as an annual event. Keep the importance of good family skills alive by use of posters, the church newsletter and/or bulletin throughout the year.
 8. Share your plans with the conference family ministries director.

WHAT IS A FAMILY?

One of the tasks of a family ministries leader is to define the families to whom they minister within their congregations. A ministry only to married couples with children, for example, will benefit only a small percentage of the people in the church. Families of all sorts may need guidance as they move toward healthy relationships. The work of coping with the daily tasks of sharing a household and managing conflict is never easy when people share space and resources or come from homes with differing values. Here are some of the ways families today are configured.

- Families are nuclear – with Mom, Dad and children who were born to this Mom and Dad.
- Families are stepfamilies – sometimes called blended. Stepfamilies are formed when parents divorce or are widowed and remarry. Some become stepfamilies when an unmarried parent marries someone not the father/mother of his/her child.
- Families are single – sometimes just me and the cat – living alone. They may be divorced, widowed or never married, but the household is a separate entity. Some singles may live with other singles in one household.
- Families are single parent – This may occur when a parent is divorced or widowed and has not remarried, or is a parent who has never married.
- Families are empty nest families – Mom and Dad when the kids leave home.
- Families are re-attached – When adult children come back to live with Mom and Dad – usually a temporary arrangement. A family is re-attached when an older parent lives with the family of a son or daughter or grandchild.

- Families are a part of the family of God. Many consider members in their congregation as family and may feel closer ties to them than those related by birth or marriage.

Beyond the usual family demographics one can also stimulate people to think about their important relationships, including those in the church family, by posing questions like these:

- If an earthquake destroyed your town, who would you be most desperate to locate to be sure they were okay?
- If you were moving a thousand miles away, who would move with you?
- Who would be the ones you'd stay in touch with, however difficult it might be?
- If you developed a long-term illness, who could you count on to take care of you?
- Who will be your family from now until you or they die?
- From whom could you borrow money and not feel like you had to pay it back right away?

COMMITTEE AND PLANNING GUIDELINES

Family ministries leaders who are either new to the position or have never served as a leader wonder where to begin! This section is to help a leader get started. It is often helpful to select a small committee with whom one can work well—people well oriented in the grace of Christ and who don't have the proverbial ax to grind. A family ministries committee, more than any other, should seek to model family. What follows are some ways to accomplish that. While these ideas are not the only way to work, they can help a group work together more smoothly. (They may be helpful to other committees as well).

- Select a small number of persons with similar concerns for families. They should represent the variety of families found in the congregation. This committee might have a single parent, married couple, divorced, retired or widowed persons, and reflect the gender and ethnic profile of the church.
- The committee should not be too large—five to seven persons are ideal. Individuals may represent more than one family category.
- Especially for the first meeting, gather in an informal setting—perhaps at someone's home or a comfortable room at the church. Begin with prayer for God's blessing.
- Provide light refreshments that include water or hot or cold drinks, something light too much on like fresh fruit, cookies, or nuts. Make it attractive, but not fussy or involving great effort.
- For the first meeting, spend time telling each other your story. This is not a therapy session so let people know that they should tell only what is comfortable. A few guidelines will help: confidentiality is to be respected and seen as a gift to one

another. It might be good for the leader to begin—starting with sentences like, “I was born in..., raised in a (Methodist, Seventh-day Adventist, Catholic or whatever) home.” Include other things like where you went to school, children’s names or other pertinent information. Include how you became a Christian or a Seventh-day Adventist or a pleasant or funny story from childhood. This may seem like a waste of time. But you may be surprised to hear the story of someone you thought you knew for a long time. The telling of our stories is how we connect and bond with each other. It will make your work together go more smoothly. It will also make it easier for committee members to be sensitive to the needs of one another.

- For all subsequent meetings, spend a portion of time—perhaps 10 or 20 minutes in re-connecting with your committee members. One might be rejoicing over an important event. Another may need support with a special need. Here are some questions you could ask to start your meetings:
 - * Who are the people you consider to be your close family?
 - * How do you live your faith together as a family?
 - * What do you think the church could do to help your family?
 - * What do you like best about your family?

Then move to the agenda. Remember that you are modeling family.

- Review results of the Interest Survey.
- Talk about goals. What do you wish to accomplish? Will it meet a need? Who are you trying to reach? How can you accomplish your goals?
- Pray for God’s blessing, plan wisely so that people do not burn out and ministry is soon underway.

An important resource for Family Ministries leader is the Family Ministries Planbook. A new edition of this resource book is published every year and includes programs, sermon outlines, seminars and much more that can be used as part of your yearly program.

A GOOD PRESENTATION WILL DO FOUR THINGS

1. **INFORM** – People should learn something they did not know prior to attending your presentation.
2. **ENTERTAIN** – People deserve not to be bored!!!
3. **TOUCH THE EMOTIONS** – Information that only informs the head never makes a change in attitude or behavior.
4. **MOVE TO ACTION** – If participants leave your presentation without a desire to DO something different –you have wasted your time and theirs!

HANDOUTS

- Distribute only when they are relevant to the presentation.
- Sometimes it's best not to distribute handouts until the end of the meeting: the audience shouldn't be rustling papers while you are speaking.
- Your audience should not read ahead and tune you out.
- Don't just copy someone else's presentation for your handouts.

INTRODUCTION

- Find out who will introduce you.
- Write your own introduction.
- Contact the person at least two days before and give them the introduction.
- Pronounce any unusual words– check accuracy of all information.
- Don't make assertions that are not true.

THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF PRESENTATIONS

1. **Know Thyself** – Body language and tone of voice make up 93% of your credibility. Would you be interested in you?
2. **Be prepared** – Know your presentation, your equipment and be ready for mishaps. Projectors always blow bulbs in the midst of important presentations so keep a spare, and know how to change it.
3. **Examine Your Speech** – Use direct expressions, and don't seek to impress—you're there to communicate.
4. **Arrive Early** – Your guests might be waiting. Be there at least a half hour before the presentation to make certain that everything is set up the way you want it to be.
5. **Tell Them What to Expect** – Tell the meeting attendees specifically what they will learn in the course of the meeting and how they will be able to apply their new knowledge. Clear goals keep attendees focused on their own responsibilities as active participants.
6. **Less Is More** – Your audience can only take so much, so limit your main points. Seven main points is roughly the maximum your audience can take in and fully contain.
7. **Keep Eye Contact** – Use note cards instead of a completely scripted speech, so you can look up and keep eye contact with your audience. Avoid the urge to READ a presentation. Your audience response will be thanks enough for sticking your neck out.
8. **Be Dramatic** – Use bold words and unusual statistics. Your presentation should be filled with simple, hard-hitting statements to keep your audience intrigued. Laughter never hurts either!
9. **Motivate** – End your presentation with a call to action. Tell your audience exactly what they can do in response to your presentation.
10. **Take A Deep Breath, and Relax!** – Don't huddle over the lectern. If you are standing behind one, stand up tall. Move around. Use gestures for emphasis. Remember how you say something is as important as what you have to say.

Reprinted from Family Ministries Handbook: The complete how-to guide for local church leaders. (2003). Lincoln, NE: AdventSource. Used with permission

FAMILY LIFE PROFILE SURVEY

Name Date of Birth

Age group: 18-30 31-40 41-50 51-60 61-70 71+

Gender: M F

Address

Telephone (Home) (Work)

Baptized SDA Yes No

If Yes, local church membership

If No, what is your religious background/present affiliation?

Marital status:

Single, never married

Single, divorced

Single, widowed

Married—Spouse's name Date of Birth

Spouse is SDA—Local church membership

Spouse is not SDA—Present religious affiliation

Children whose primary residence is with you:

Name Birthdate

Grade in school School attending

Baptized SDA? Local church membership

Name Birthdate

Grade in school School attending

Baptized SDA? Local church membership

Children whose primary residence is elsewhere:

Name Birthdate
Baptized SDA? Local church membership

Name Birthdate
Baptized SDA? Local church membership

Other family members living with you:

Name Birthdate
Baptized SDA? Local church membership
Family Relationship

Name Birthdate
Baptized SDA? Local church membership
Family Relationship

What is the most significant thing the Family Ministries Committee could do this year to address the interests/needs of your family?

.....
.....

I am interested in Family Ministries and am willing to help by

- Telephoning as needed
- Participating in planning sessions
- Providing transportation
- Preparation for events
- Help with meals/refreshments
- Child care
- Advertising
- Other
- Presenting lectures/classes/seminars/workshops or other presentations

Your interest area(s)

.....

FAMILY LIFE PROFILE

Church Date

FAMILY CATEGORY

Active Members

- With Children Under 18
- No Children Under 18

Married—Spouse is a Member

- Ages 18-30
- Ages 31-50
- Ages 51-60
- Ages 61-70
- Ages 71 +

Single—Never Married

- Ages 18-30
- Ages 31-50
- Ages 51-60
- Ages 61-70
- Ages 71 +

Inactive Members

- With Children Under 18
- No Children Under 18

Married—Spouse is a Non-member

- Ages 18-30
- Ages 31-50
- Ages 51-60
- Ages 61-70
- Ages 71 +

Single—Divorced

- Ages 18-30
- Ages 31-50
- Ages 51-60
- Ages 61-70
- Ages 71 +

FAMILY MINISTRIES INTEREST SURVEY

Your age group: 18-30 31-40 41-50 51-60 61-70 71+
Gender: M F

From the topics below, please select the five that are of most interest to you.
Place a check in front of each one you select:

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

Suggested guest speakers/presenters:

Name

Address Telephone

Area(s) of specialty

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

| | Sun. | Mon. | Tue. | Wed. | Thu. | Fri. | Sat. |
|-----------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Morning | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Afternoon | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Evening | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

COMMUNITY FAMILY LIFE EDUCATION SURVEY

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

.....

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

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

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

| | Sun. | Mon. | Tue. | Wed. | Thu. | Fri. | Sat. |
|-----------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|-----------------------|
| Morning | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Afternoon | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |
| Evening | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> | <input type="radio"/> |

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

Sex: M F

Age: (Please circle the appropriate group.)

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

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

Are you:

- | | |
|-------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="radio"/> Never married | <input type="radio"/> Married |
| <input type="radio"/> Separated | <input type="radio"/> Divorced |
| <input type="radio"/> Widowed | <input type="radio"/> Remarried after divorce |

SAMPLE EVALUATION

1. What inspired you most about this workshop?

.....

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

.....

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

.....

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

.....

5. How could this workshop be improved?

.....

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

1 2 3 4 5
Generally Somewhat Somewhat Generally Very
Dissatisfied Dissatisfied Satisfied Satisfied Satisfied

7. Who made this evaluation?

Your age group: 18-30 31-40 41-50 51-60 61-70 71+

Gender: M F

Marital Status:

Never married Married
 Separated Divorced
 Widowed

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

..... years months

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

APPENDIX B VOTED STATEMENTS

— These *Voted Statements* are official positions of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on these topics.

AFFIRMATION OF MARRIAGE

Issues related to marriage can be seen in their true light only as they are viewed against the background of the divine ideal for marriage. Marriage was divinely established in Eden and affirmed by Jesus Christ to be both monogamous and heterosexual, a lifelong union of loving companionship between a man and a woman. In the culmination of His creative activity, God fashioned humankind as male and female in His own image; and He instituted marriage, a covenant-based union of the two genders physically, emotionally, and spiritually, spoken of in Scripture as “one flesh.”

Arising from the diversity of the two human genders, the oneness of marriage images in a singular way the unity within diversity of the Godhead. Throughout Scripture, the heterosexual union in marriage is elevated as a symbol of the bond between Deity and humanity. It is a human witness to God’s self-giving love and covenant with His people. The harmonious affiliation of a man and a woman in marriage provides a microcosm of social unity that is time-honored as a core ingredient of stable societies. Further, the Creator intended married sexuality not only to serve a unitive purpose, but to provide for the propagation and perpetuation of the human family. In the divine purpose, procreation springs from and is entwined with the same process whereby husband and wife may find joy, pleasure and physical completeness. It is to a husband and wife whose love has enabled them to know each other in a deep sexual bond that a child may be entrusted. Their child is a living embodiment of their oneness. The growing child thrives in the atmosphere of married love and unity in which he or she was conceived and has the benefit of a relationship with each of the natural parents.

The monogamous union in marriage of a man and a woman is affirmed as the divinely ordained foundation of the family and social life and the only morally appropriate locus of

genital or related intimate sexual expression. However, the estate of marriage is not God's only plan for the meeting of human relational needs or for knowing the experience of family. Singleness and the friendship of singles are within the divine design as well. The companionship and support of friends looms in importance in both biblical testaments. The fellowship of the Church, the household of God, is available to all regardless of their married state. Scripture, however, places a solid demarcation socially and sexually between such friendship relations and marriage.

To this biblical view of marriage the Seventh-day Adventist Church adheres without reservation, believing that any lowering of this high view is to that extent a lowering of the heavenly ideal. Because marriage has been corrupted by sin, the purity and beauty of marriage as it was designed by God needs to be restored. Through an appreciation of the redemptive work of Christ and the work of His Spirit in human hearts, the original purpose of marriage may be recovered and the delightful and wholesome experience of marriage realized by a man and a woman who join their lives in the marriage covenant.

STATEMENT ON HOME AND FAMILY

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

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

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

This public statement was released by the General Conference president, Neal C. Wilson, after consultation with the 16 world vice presidents of Seventh-day Adventists, on June 27, 1985, at the General Conference session in New Orleans, Louisiana.

STATEMENT ON CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

Child sexual abuse occurs when a person older or stronger than the child uses his or her power, authority, or position of trust to involve a child in sexual behavior or activity. Incest, a specific form of child sexual abuse, is defined as any sexual activity between a child and a parent, a sibling, an extended family member, or a step/surrogate parent.

Sexual abusers may be men or women and may be of any age, nationality, or socio-economic background. They are often men who are married with children, have respectable jobs, and may be regular churchgoers. It is common for offenders to strongly deny their abusive behavior, to refuse to see their actions as a problem, and to rationalize their behavior or place blame on something or someone else. While it is true that many abusers exhibit deeply rooted insecurities and low self-esteem, these problems should never be accepted as an excuse for sexually abusing a child. Most authorities agree that the real issue in child sexual abuse is more related to a desire for power and control than for sex.

When God created the human family, He began with a marriage between a man and a woman based on mutual love and trust. This relationship is still designed to provide the foundation for a stable, happy family in which the dignity, worth, and integrity of each family member is protected and upheld. Every child, whether male or female, is to be affirmed as a gift from God. Parents are given the privilege and responsibility of providing nurture, protection, and physical care for the children entrusted to them by God. Children should be able to honor, respect, and trust their parents and other family members without the risk of abuse.

The Bible condemns child sexual abuse in the strongest possible terms. It sees any attempt to confuse, blur, or denigrate personal, generational, or gender boundaries through sexually abusive behavior as an act of betrayal and a gross violation of personhood. It openly condemns abuses of power, authority, and responsibility because these strike at the very heart of the victims' deepest feelings about

themselves, others, and God, and shatter their capacity to love and trust. Jesus used strong language to condemn the actions of anyone who, through word or deed, causes a child to stumble.

The Adventist Christian community is not immune from child sexual abuse. We believe that the tenets of the Seventh-day Adventist faith require us to be actively involved in its prevention. We are also committed to spiritually assisting abused and abusive individuals and their families in their healing and recovery process, and to holding church professionals and church lay leaders accountable for maintaining their personal behavior as is appropriate for persons in positions of spiritual leadership and trust.

As a Church we believe our faith calls us to:

1. Uphold the principles of Christ for family relationships in which the self-respect, dignity, and purity of children are recognized as divinely mandated rights.
2. Provide an atmosphere where children who have been abused can feel safe when reporting sexual abuse and can feel that someone will listen to them.
3. Become thoroughly informed about sexual abuse and its impact upon our own church community.
4. Help ministers and lay leaders to recognize the warning signs of child sexual abuse and know how to respond appropriately when abuse is suspected or a child reports being sexually abused.
5. Establish referral relationships with professional counselors and local sexual assault agencies who can, with their professional skills, assist abuse victims and their families.
6. Create guidelines/policies at the appropriate levels to assist church leaders in:
 - a. Endeavoring to treat with fairness persons accused of sexually abusing children,
 - b. Holding abusers accountable for their actions and administering appropriate discipline.
7. Support the education and enrichment of families and family members by:
 - h. Dispelling commonly held religious and cultural beliefs which may be used to justify or cover up child sexual abuse.
 - i. Building a healthy sense of personal worth in each child which enables him or her to respect self and others.
 - j. Fostering Christlike relationships between males and females in the home and in the church.
8. Provide caring support and a faith-based redemptive ministry within the church community for abuse survivors and abusers while enabling them to access the available network of professional resources in the community.
9. Encourage the training of more family professionals to facilitate the healing and recovery process of abuse victims and perpetrators.

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

This statement was voted during the Spring Meeting of the General Conference Executive Committee on Tuesday, April 1, 1997, in Loma Linda, California.

STATEMENT ON FAMILY VIOLENCE

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

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

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

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

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

It is our belief that the Church has a responsibility-

1. To care for those involved in family violence and to respond to their needs by:
 - b. Listening to and accepting those suffering from abuse, loving and affirming them as persons of value and worth.
 - c. Highlighting the injustices of abuse and speaking out in defense of victims both within the community of faith and in society.
 - d. Providing a caring, supportive ministry to families affected by violence and abuse, seeking to enable both victims and perpetrators to access counseling with Seventh-day Adventist professionals where available or other professional resources in the community.
 - e. Encouraging the training and placement of licensed Seventh-day Adventist professional services for both church members and the surrounding communities.
 - f. Offering a ministry of reconciliation when the perpetrator's repentance makes possible the contemplation of forgiveness and restoration in relationships. Repentance always includes acceptance of full responsibility for the wrongs committed, willingness to make restitution in every way possible, and changes in behavior to eliminate the abuse.
 - g. Focusing the light of the gospel on the nature of husband-wife, parent-child, and other close relationships, and empowering individuals and families to grow toward God's ideals in their lives together.
 - h. Guarding against the ostracism of either victims or perpetrators within the family or church community, while firmly holding perpetrators responsible for their actions.
2. To strengthen family life by:
 - c. Providing family life education which is grace-oriented and includes a biblical understanding of the mutuality, equality, and respect indispensable to Christian relationships.

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

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

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

STATEMENT ON THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF UNBORN LIFE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR ABORTION

Human beings are created in the image of God. Part of the gift that God has given us as humans is procreation, the ability to participate in creation along with the Author of life. This sacred gift should always be valued and treasured. In God's original plan every pregnancy should be the result of the expression of love between a man and a woman committed to each other in marriage. A pregnancy should be wanted, and each baby should be loved, valued, and nurtured even before birth. Unfortunately, since the entrance of sin, Satan has made intentional efforts to mar the image of God by defacing all of God's gifts—including the gift of procreation. Consequently, individuals are at times faced with difficult dilemmas and decisions regarding a pregnancy.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is committed to the teachings and principles of the Holy Scriptures which express God's values on life and provide guidance for prospective mothers and fathers, medical personnel, churches, and all believers in matters of faith, doctrine, ethical behavior, and lifestyle. The Church while not being the conscience of individual believers has the duty to convey the principles and teachings of the Word of God.

This statement affirms the sanctity of life and presents biblical principles bearing on abortion. As used in this statement, abortion is defined as any action aimed at the termination of a pregnancy and does not include the spontaneous termination of a pregnancy, known also as a miscarriage.

BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES AND TEACHINGS RELATING TO ABORTION

As the practice of abortion must be weighed in the light of Scripture, the following biblical principles and teachings provide guidance for the community of faith and individuals affected by such difficult choices:

1. God upholds the value and sacredness of human life. Human life is of the greatest value to God. Having created humanity in His image (Genesis 1:27; 2:7), God has a personal interest in people. God loves them and communicates with them, and they in turn can love and communicate with Him.

Life is a gift of God, and God is the Giver of life. In Jesus is life (John 1:4). He has life in Himself (John 5:26). He is the resurrection and the life (John 11:25; 14:6). He provides abundant life (John 10:10). Those who have the Son have life (1 John 5:12). He is also the Sustainer of life (Acts 17:25-28; Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:1-3), and the Holy Spirit is described as the Spirit of life (Romans 8:2). God cares deeply for His creation and especially for humankind.

Furthermore, the importance of human life is made clear by the fact that, after the Fall (Genesis 3), God “gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life” (John 3:16). While God could have abandoned and terminated sinful humanity, He opted for life. Consequently, Christ’s followers will be raised from the dead and will live in face-to-face communion with God (John 11:25-26; 1 Thessalonians 4:15-16; Revelation 21:3). Thus, human life is of inestimable value. This is true for all stages of human life: the unborn, children of various ages, adolescents, adults, and seniors—independent of physical, mental, and emotional capacities. It is also true for all humans regardless of sex, ethnicity, social status, religion, and whatever else may distinguish them. Such an understanding of the sanctity of life gives inviolable and equal value to each and every human life and requires it to be treated with the utmost respect and care.

2. God considers the unborn child as human life. Prenatal life is precious in God’s sight, and the Bible describes God’s knowledge of people before they were conceived. “Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them” (Psalm 139:16). In certain cases, God directly guided prenatal life. Samson was to “be a Nazirite to God from the womb” (Judges 13:5). The servant of God is “called from the womb” (Isaiah 49:1, 5). Jeremiah was already chosen as a prophet before his birth (Jeremiah 1:5), as was Paul (Galatians 1:15), and John the Baptist was to “be filled with the Holy Spirit, even from his mother’s womb” (Luke 1:15). Of Jesus the angel Gabriel explained to Mary: “therefore the child to be born will be called holy—the Son of God” (Luke 1:35). In His Incarnation Jesus Himself experienced the human prenatal period and was recognized as the Messiah and Son of God soon after His conception (Luke 1:40-45). The Bible already attributes to the unborn child joy (Luke 1:44) and even rivalry (Genesis 25:21-23). Those not-yet-born have a firm place with God (Job 10:8-12; 31:13-15). Biblical law shows a strong regard for protecting human life and considers harm to or the loss of a baby or mother as a result of a violent act a serious issue (Exodus 21:22-23).

3. *The will of God regarding human life is expressed in the Ten Commandments and explained by Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount.* The Decalogue was given to God's covenant people and the world to guide their lives and protect them. Its commandments are unchanging truths which should be cherished, respected, and obeyed. The Psalmist praises God's law (e.g., Psalm 119), and Paul calls it holy, righteous, and good (Romans 7:12). The sixth commandment states: "You shall not kill" (Exodus 20:13), which calls for the preservation of human life. The principle to preserve life enshrined in the sixth commandment places abortion within its scope. Jesus reinforced the commandment not to kill in Matthew 5:21-22. Life is protected by God. It is not measured by individuals' abilities or their usefulness, but by the value that God's creation and sacrificial love has placed on it. Personhood, human value, and salvation are not earned or merited but graciously granted by God.

4. *God is the Owner of life, and human beings are His stewards.* Scripture teaches that God owns everything (Psalm 50:10-12). God has a dual claim on humans. They are His because He is their Creator and therefore He owns them (Psalm 139:13-16). They are also His because He is their Redeemer and has bought them with the highest possible price—His own life (1 Corinthians 6:19-20). This means that all human beings are stewards of whatever God has entrusted to them, including their own lives, the lives of their children, and the unborn.

The stewardship of life also includes carrying responsibilities which in some ways limit their choices (1 Corinthians 9:19-22). Since God is the Giver and Owner of life, human beings do not have ultimate control over themselves and should seek to preserve life wherever possible. The principle of the stewardship of life obligates the community of believers to guide, support, care for, and love those facing decisions about pregnancies.

5. *The Bible teaches care for the weak and the vulnerable.* God Himself cares for those who are disadvantaged and oppressed and protects them. He "shows no partiality nor takes a bribe. He administers justice for the fatherless and the widow, and loves the stranger, giving him food and clothing" (Deuteronomy 10:17-18, cf. Psalm 82:3-4; James 1:27). He does not hold children accountable for the sins of their fathers (Ezekiel 18:20). God expects the same of His children. They are called to help vulnerable people and ease their lot (Psalm 41:1; 82:3-4; Acts 20:35). Jesus speaks of the least of His brothers (Matthew 25:40), for whom His followers are responsible, and of the little ones who should not be despised or lost (Matthew 18:10-14). The very youngest, namely the unborn, should be counted among them.

6. *God's grace promotes life in a world marred by sin and death.* It is God's nature to protect, preserve, and sustain life. In addition to the providence of God over His creation (Psalm 103:19; Colossians 1:17; Hebrews 1:3), the Bible acknowledges the wide-ranging, devastating, and degrading effects of sin on the creation, including on human bodies. In Romans 8:20-24 Paul describes the impact of the Fall as subjecting the creation to futility. Consequently, in rare

and extreme cases, human conception may produce pregnancies with fatal prospects and/or acute, life-threatening birth anomalies that present individuals and couples with exceptional dilemmas. Decisions in such cases may be left to the conscience of the individuals involved and their families. These decisions should be well-informed and guided by the Holy Spirit and the biblical view of life outlined above. God's grace promotes and protects life. Individuals in these challenging situations may come to Him in sincerity and find direction, comfort, and peace in the Lord.

IMPLICATIONS

The Seventh-day Adventist Church considers abortion out of harmony with God's plan for human life. It affects the unborn, the mother, the father, immediate and extended family members, the church family, and society with long-term consequences for all. Believers aim to trust God and follow His will for them, knowing He has their best interests in mind.

While not condoning abortion, the Church and its members are called to follow the example of Jesus, being "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14), to (1) create an atmosphere of true love and provide grace-filled, biblical pastoral care and loving support to those facing difficult decisions regarding abortion; (2) enlist the help of well-functioning and committed families and educate them to provide care for struggling individuals, couples, and families; (3) encourage church members to open their homes to those in need, including single-parents, parentless children, and adoptive or foster care children; (4) care deeply for and support in various ways pregnant women who decide to keep their unborn children; and (5) provide emotional and spiritual support to those who have aborted a child for various reasons or were forced to have an abortion and may be hurting physically, emotionally, and/or spiritually.

The issue of abortion presents enormous challenges, but it gives individuals and the Church the opportunity to be what they aspire to be, the fellowship of brothers and sisters, the community of believers, the family of God, revealing His immeasurable and unfailing love.



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12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, Maryland 20904, USA
301.680.6175 office
family@gc.adventist.org
family.adventist.org



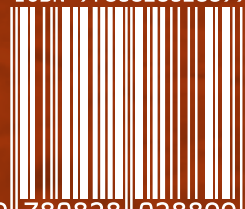
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