

## The Threefold Cord of Education: Home, Church, School- United for Eternity



By Rox-Anne Mckoy Chambers

***...and a threefold cord is not quickly broken.***  
**Ecclesiastes 4:12**

Mark Finley, former host and director of *It Is Written* (1991–2004) and a retired vice president for the Seventh-day Adventist world church, shares a fascinating story about a monastery located high on a cliff, where the only means of transportation was by a bucket suspended from a rope. One day, a tourist was making an uncertain journey in the bucket when he noticed something unsettling—the rope was old, frayed, and tattered. With concern, he asked the tour guide operating the pulley, “How often do you replace the rope?” The tour guide calmly replied, “Every time it breaks.”

Now, think about that for a moment. How many of us live the same way? Like the tour guide we wait until something is broken before we fix it. We wait until we’re overweight and facing a life-altering diagnosis before we start eating healthy or exercising. We wait until our marriage is crumbling before we begin nurturing our relationship. We wait until a crisis hits before we build a meaningful prayer life. We simply wait, wait until it breaks before we fix it!

If we take a moment to apply this story to the process of education, we can envision a tour guide as more than just someone leading a group. This guide could be a parent, teacher, guardian, elder, pastor, or anyone entrusted with shaping the minds of our children. The rope represents the principles, values, and methods we use to guide them through life, preparing them not only for success in this world but also for eternity. The bucket symbolizes the environment we place them in—one that influences their growth, development, and ultimate destination. Now, consider this question: How strong is your rope? What are its strands made of?

A strong, reliable rope is essential for steady and secure guidance. One of the oldest and most widely used rope structures consists of three strands twisted together (McKenna et al., 2004). The strength of the rope lies in the unity of these strands. When unbraided, unwoven, or separated, it weakens, losing its effectiveness and resilience (Original Strength, 2018). This is why the Bible reminds us, “A threefold cord is not quickly broken” (Ecclesiastes 4:12, KJV). In this reading, I present to you the threefold cord of education: home, church, and school a reflection of God’s ideal plan for education.

First, we will explore the purpose of God’s system of education. Next, we will examine the distinct roles of the home, school, and church in carrying out this divine mission. Then, we

will highlight the essential unity among these three pillars in achieving lasting, eternal benefits. Finally, we will reflect on our mandate in fulfilling this sacred responsibility.

### **The purpose behind God's system of education**

White (1903) emphasizes that to truly grasp the scope of education, we must first understand both the nature of humanity and God's purpose in creating us. Additionally, we must consider how humanity's condition has been altered by the knowledge of evil and how God's plan seeks to restore His divine purpose through education. In a sermon "Lord Save our Children" Chambers (2010) highlights that:

When God created Adam and Eve, He made them perfect, forming them "*in His own image*" (Genesis 1:26-27, KJV). They were holy, pure, righteous, and good, reflecting God's character. Not only did He command them to be fruitful and multiply, but He also intended for their children to inherit their holiness, obedience, and righteousness. God's original plan was for the world to be filled with people who remained faithful to Him—free from sin, hatred, violence, or corruption. In such a world, there would be no need for fear, as parents would never have to worry about how their children would turn out.

However, when Adam and Eve sinned, they fell under the dominion of sin, and their descendants would inherit this fallen nature. As David lamented, "*Behold, I was brought forth in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me*" (Psalm 51:5, KJV). As a result of Adam's disobedience, sin entered the world, bringing death and condemnation upon all humankind (John 8:34; Romans 5:12). Although man was originally created in God's image, the fall altered this divine reflection. Scripture records, "*Adam lived a hundred and thirty years, and begat a son in his own likeness, after his image*" (Genesis 5:3, KJV). This signifies that Adam's children were not born into the divine perfection he once possessed but instead inherited his imperfections and sinful nature from birth. As the Bible declares, "*Well do I know how treacherous you are; you were called a rebel from birth*" (Isaiah 48:8, NIV). Chambers (2010, para 3-4)

Due to our sinful nature, we need an education system that not only prepares us for academic success and good citizenship but one that transforms the hearts of our children. As White (1892) explains, "Education, culture, the exercise of the will, human effort—all have their proper sphere, but here they are powerless. They may produce outward correctness of behaviour, but they cannot change the heart; they cannot purify the springs of life. There must be a power working from within, a new life from above, before men can be changed from sin to holiness. That power is Christ. His grace alone can quicken the lifeless faculties of the soul and attract it to God, to holiness" (p. 18). This highlights the need for an education that goes beyond mere academics—one that reaches the heart and soul, fostering true transformation through the power of Christ. Such an education, as White (1903) describes, seeks to "restore in men and women the image of their Maker, to bring them back to the perfection in which they were created—this was to be the work of redemption. This is the object of education, the great object of life" (p. 104).

### **Role of the Home, Church and School**

To fulfil this divine purpose, God has woven a threefold cord in education—connecting heaven and our children through the home, church, and school. Likewise, Simmons (2022)

affirms that education, when seen through the lens of the great controversy between good and evil, is more than just instruction—it is a ministry. This sacred ministry, carried out through the home, church, and school, is deeply intertwined with the work of redemption, as true education and redemption are one. Thus, Seventh-day Adventist education is not merely a privileged option; it is a divine mandate, central to God’s redemptive plan.

The first strand in this divine threefold cord of education is the home. As the child’s first school, the home lays the foundation for lifelong learning, shaping character, values, and faith from the very beginning. “In His wisdom, the Lord has decreed that the family shall be the greatest of all educational agencies. It is in the home that the education of the child is to begin. Here is his first school. Here, with his parents as instructors, he is to learn the lessons that are to guide him throughout life—lessons of respect, obedience, reverence, and self-control” (White, 1892, p. 182). As a prime example, “the child Jesus did not receive instruction in the synagogue schools. His mother was His first human teacher. From her lips and from the scrolls of the prophets, He learned of heavenly things” (White, 1898, p. 71).

As parents, we have a sacred responsibility to prayerfully guide and train our children in the path of righteousness, instilling in them the principles that will shape their character and future. The Scriptures command us to be diligent in this duty: “And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up. And thou shalt bind them for a sign upon thine hand, and they shall be as frontlets between thine eyes. And thou shalt write them upon the posts of thy house, and on thy gates.” (Deuteronomy 6:6-9, KJV)

The wisdom of Solomon reinforces this principle:

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

The Apostle Paul also commends the faithfulness of Timothy’s mother, Eunice, and his grandmother, Lois, for their early training of Timothy, stating:

“I am reminded of your sincere faith, which first lived in your grandmother Lois and in your mother Eunice and, I am persuaded, now lives in you also.” (2 Timothy 1:5, NIV)

“And that from a child thou hast known the holy scriptures, which are able to make thee wise unto salvation through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” (2 Timothy 3:15, KJV)

These passages emphasize the profound influence of parental and generational instruction in shaping a child’s spiritual foundation. It is through this early guidance that children develop a strong and enduring faith, one that will sustain them throughout their lives.

The second strand in this divine threefold cord of education is the church. Jesus gave the church its mandate at the conclusion of His ministry: “*Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you*” (Matthew 28:19-20). Our churches serve as centres of instruction, guiding students to become disciples of Jesus. They nurture spiritual well-being and foster a community where believers can thrive in their faith.

Wesley (2016) emphasizes that early believers devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching, which transformed their lives, influenced society, and contributed to the church's growth. The apostle Paul built upon the foundation laid by Timothy's mother and grandmother, continuing this tradition by mentoring Timothy. He encouraged him to develop strong character, resist materialism, and lead by example. Timothy was later called to serve in ministry. This highlights the Christian Church's role as a school of witness and evangelism, demonstrating the enduring impact of early Christian education.

The third cord of education is the school. According to Maitanmi (2019), the demands of modern life and the necessity for parents to work outside the home to support their families have made teachers increasingly vital as parental figures in children's lives. As a result, the school serves as an extension of the Christian home, reflecting and upholding the same values taught in both the home and the church. Students should be nurtured by Christian parents, pastors, spiritual leaders, and teachers who model these values. Nielsen (2023) submits that when students witness genuine spirituality being modeled by three significant adults in their lives, they are far more likely to develop an authentic love for Jesus themselves. In this context, teachers in Adventist schools often become one of these key figures. Consequently, the Seventh-day Adventist school system is designed to give more than mere academics. It prepares students for service in both this life and eternity, fostering the development of their physical, mental, and spiritual capacities (White, 1903). The uniqueness of Adventist Christian education is articulated in the General Conference Working Policy, Section FE 05 (as cited in Wesley, 2022, p. 25), as illustrated in Figure 1.

**Figure 1: General Conference Working Policy, Section FE 05**

The Seventh-day Adventist philosophy of education is Christ-centered. Adventists believe that, under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, God's character and purposes can be understood as revealed in the Bible, in Jesus Christ, and in nature. The distinctive characteristics of Adventist education—derived from the Bible and the writings of Ellen G White—point to the redemptive aim of true education: to restore human beings into the image of their Maker. Seventh-day Adventists believe that God is infinitely loving, wise, and powerful. He relates to human beings on a personal level, presenting

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Seventh-day Adventists believe that God is infinitely loving, wise, and powerful. He relates to human beings on a personal level, presenting His character as the ultimate norm for human conduct and His grace as the means of restoration.

Adventists recognize that human motives, thinking, and behavior have fallen short of God's ideal. Education, in its broadest sense, is a means of restoring human beings to their original relationship with God. Working together, homes, schools, and churches cooperate with divine agencies in preparing learners for responsible citizenship in this world and in the world-to-come.

Adventist education imparts more than academic knowledge. It fosters a balanced development of the whole person—spiritually, intellectually, physically, and socially. Its time dimensions span eternity. It seeks to develop a life of faith in God and respect for the dignity of all human beings; to build character akin to that of the Creator, to nurture thinkers rather than mere reflectors of others' thoughts; to promote loving service rather than selfish ambition; to ensure maximum development of each individual's potential; and to embrace all that is true, good, and beautiful.

### **Unity among these three pillars**

When answering the question, *how strong is your rope? What are its strands made of?* consider the preparations you have in place to guide your children through life. Like a tour guide, how are you ensuring they are equipped for the journey ahead? What is the state of your supporting community? Are the three strands of your cord—home, church, and school—strong and secure? Do they align under the same redemptive principles, or are they pulling in different directions?

The Cognitive Genesis study (2005, as cited in Nielsen, 2023) suggests that the most effective character development occurs through a three-way partnership of parents, church, and school. In a similar vein, the Valuegenesis study (McClintock, 2017) found that spiritual growth and commitment were significantly stronger when these three entities supported each other. Therefore, children need strong homes, churches, and church schools working together to have the best chance of developing a mature Christian faith. When the home, church and

school collaborate with divine agencies we will be better able to produce responsible citizens in this world and for eternity.

## Appeal

The eternal destiny of our children is too sacred for us to be anything less than being intentional about the rope—the principles, values, and methods—we use to guide them through life. Our responsibility extends beyond preparing them for success in this world; we must also equip them for eternity. We cannot afford for any strand of this rope to weaken or fray, for if it does, we risk it breaking altogether, leaving our children vulnerable to the perils of this world.

White (1913) urges us to work together for the well-being of our children, emphasizing that the responsibility should not rest on teachers alone. She calls for the active cooperation and support of every church member. Parents, she advises, must make every effort to place their children in environments that foster the character God desires. They should utilize every spiritual resource available to guide and protect their children. While the forces of evil may seek to harm them, God will raise a standard against the enemy.

Do you feel a deep need to protect your children? An urge to build a fortress around them? The adage reminds us that “*it takes a village to raise a child*”, and God’s design for that village includes the, home, the church, and the school. Solomon’s wise words— “*A threefold cord is not quickly broken*” (Ecclesiastes 4:12, KJV)—emphasize the strength found in unity, in shared purpose, and in allied goals. When Christ is at the center of our homes, churches, and schools, He takes responsibility for securing the eternal future of our children.

Are you willing to embrace God’s plan? Will you commit today to making your home a place of worship where Christian values are instilled in your children? Are we dedicated to ensuring that our churches remain houses of prayer rather than dens of thieves, so our children can grow in faith and discipleship? Will we stand alongside them in their educational journey, ensuring they are taught in the ways of the Lord? Let us prayerfully surrender to Jesus, allowing Him to do a greater work in each of us.

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