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Adventist<sup>®</sup>  
Family Ministries

2026 RESOURCE BOOK

# **FAMILY, FAITH, AND FOCUS IN A DIGITAL WORLD**

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER



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DELBERT AND SUSAN BAKER • HEATHER BEESON • BRYAN CAFFERKY • ZENO L. CHARLES-MARCEL  
ORATHAI CHURESON • CÉSAR AND CAROLANN DE LEÓN • DAWN JACOBSON-VENN • ELIZABETH JAMES  
PETER N. LANDLESS • SHONDEL MISHAW • WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER • KELDIE PAROSCHI  
MARCOS PASEGGI • MERLE POIRIER • MINDY SALYERS • MILDRED WEISS • MONIQUE WILLIS.



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## Adventist<sup>®</sup> Family Ministries

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#### Contributors:

Delbert and Susan Baker, Heather Beeson, Bryan Cafferky, Zeno L. Charles-Marcel, Orathai Chureson, César and Carolann De León, Dawn Jacobson-Venn, Elizabeth James, Peter N. Landless, Shondel Mishaw, Willie and Elaine Oliver, Keldie Paroschi, Marcos Paseggi, Merle Poirier, Mindy Salyers, Mildred Weiss, Monique Willis.

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Adventist Family Ministries  
General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists  
12501 Old Columbia Pike  
Silver Spring, MD 20904, USA  
[family@gc.adventist.org](mailto:family@gc.adventist.org)  
[family.adventist.org](http://family.adventist.org)

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# PREFACE

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Let's be honest—our phones buzz more than our doorbells these days. Our kids know their way around TikTok better than they know their way to meaningful conversation. And somewhere between managing screen time and monitoring online activity, many of us wonder if we're losing the battle for our families' hearts and minds.

If you've picked up this book, you're probably asking some tough questions: How do I compete with a device that's designed to capture attention? How do I teach my kids about God's love when they're getting their life lessons from YouTube? How do I create a Christ-centered home when everyone's scattered across different screens?

Here's what we've learned: You don't have to choose between faith and the digital world. Technology isn't the enemy—it's a tool. And like any tool, it amplifies what's already in our hearts. The real question isn't whether we should use technology, but how we can use it wisely to strengthen our families instead of pulling them apart.

*Family, Faith, and Focus in a Digital World* is born out of real conversations with real families wrestling with real challenges. We've talked with parents who feel like they're speaking a foreign language to their kids. We've sat with families where everyone's physically present but emotionally elsewhere. We've seen the frustration, the guilt, and yes, sometimes the defeat that comes with trying to raise godly children in a hyperconnected world.

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**“You don't have to choose between faith and the digital world. Technology isn't the enemy—it's a tool. And like any tool, it amplifies what's already in our hearts.”**

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But we've also seen something beautiful: families who have found ways to make technology work for them rather than against them. Parents who've discovered that the same creativity God gave us to solve problems can help us

navigate digital challenges. Kids who are learning that being connected online can enhance their connection with God and family when done thoughtfully.

In these pages, you'll find practical ideas that work in the real world—not perfect theories that only work in perfect homes. We'll talk about setting boundaries that stick, having conversations about online choices that don't end in arguments, and finding ways to use technology to bring your family closer together, not drive them further apart.

Most importantly, this isn't a resource book about retreating from the modern world. It's about engaging it with wisdom. The same God who guided families through every major change in human history—from agricultural to industrial to digital—is with us now. His truth doesn't change, even when everything else seems to.

Our prayer is simple: that your family will discover how to thrive, not just survive, in our digital age. That faith will grow deeper, focus will become clearer, and family bonds will strengthen through both meaningful connections and intentional breaks from the screen.

After all, we're all just trying to raise kids who love God and love others well—and that calling remains the same whether we're doing it with stone tablets, printing presses, or smartphones. As long as we're “grounded in the Bible, and focused on the mission.”

Maranatha!

### **Willie and Elaine Oliver, Directors**

Department of Family Ministries

General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists

World Headquarters

Silver Spring, Maryland

[family.adventist.org](http://family.adventist.org)



# HOW TO USE THIS RESOURCE BOOK

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The Family Ministries Resource Book is an annual resource organized by the General Conference Adventist Family Ministries 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.

Within this Resource Book you will find sermon ideas, seminars, children's stories, leadership resources, and other tools 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/2026RB](https://family.adventist.org/2026RB)

For more topics on a range of family life issues, download previous years of the Resource Book at [family.adventist.org/resource-book/](https://family.adventist.org/resource-book/)

## **CHRISTIAN HOME AND MARRIAGE WEEK: FEBRUARY 14-21**

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 14**

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 21**

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 6-12**

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 families and the church as a family.

A supplemental resource with daily readings and family activities will be provided for the Family Togetherness Week of Prayer. To download this resource please visit: [family.adventist.org/familyworship](http://family.adventist.org/familyworship)

### **FAMILY TOGETHERNESS DAY OF PRAYER (FOR MARRIAGES, FAMILIES AND RELATIONSHIPS): SABBATH, SEPTEMBER 12**

Use the **Family Sermon** idea for the Sabbath worship service found in this Resource Book.

# SERMON IDEAS

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

- **A TIME FOR EVERY PURPOSE:  
RECLAIMING GOD'S RHYTHM IN THE DIGITAL AGE..... 12**

This sermon invites families to rediscover divine balance—teaching how sacred rhythms of rest, worship, and presence restore peace and unity.

- **WHEN KNOWLEDGE INCREASES:  
FAMILIES OF FAITH IN A DIGITAL AGE.....24**

This message reveals how prophetic knowledge and modern technology test our faith, guiding families to use innovation for mission.

- **GUARDING OUR HOMES:  
HELPING FAMILIES MANAGE THE INTRUSION OF TECHNOLOGY .....35**

This sermon equips families to protect their hearts from digital invasion by nurturing discernment, boundaries, and Christ-centered relationships in the home.

# A TIME FOR EVERY PURPOSE: RECLAIMING GOD'S RHYTHM IN THE DIGITAL AGE

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BY WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

## **THE TEXT:**

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

## **INTRODUCTION:**

### **THE TYRANNY OF THE PING**

We would like to begin by asking you a question. How many of you checked your phone before you even got out of bed today? Don't be ashamed now—keep those hands up! How many of you have felt that anxious flutter in your chest when you can't find your phone? How many families are sitting around the dinner table, but everybody's face is glowing blue from a screen instead of glowing with the warmth of conversation?

---

**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.

We live in an age, beloved, where we are more connected than ever before, yet families are falling apart. We can FaceTime (video chat) with someone on the other side of the world, but we can't have a heart-to-heart with the person sleeping in the bed next to us. We know what strangers had for breakfast on Instagram, but we don't know what our own children are struggling with in their souls.

The enemy has been clever, dear ones. He has taken the very tools that could bring us together and turned them into chains that separate us. He has made us slaves to the notification, servants to the screen, and prisoners to the ping.

But we've got good news for you today! The same God who set the rhythm of the universe—who established day and night, summer and winter, seedtime and harvest, and gave us Sabbath—this same God has given us a blueprint for ordering our lives, even in this digital age.

Today's message is titled *A Time for Every Purpose: Reclaiming God's Rhythm in the Digital Age*. Let's pray.

### **PRAYER:**

*Gracious Father, as we open Your Word today, open our hearts to hear what You would say to us about the times we live in. Help us to discern Your voice above the noise of this digital age. Give us wisdom to order our days according to Your perfect timing. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

Please turn with me to Ecclesiastes chapter 3, and let's read together verses 1 through 8.

### **THE TEXT:**

#### **ECCLESIASTES 3:1-8**

*"To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck what is planted; A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; A time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; A time to gain, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; A time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war; and a time of peace."*

## MAIN TEXT ANALYSIS: THE DIVINE RHYTHM

### I. THE SOVEREIGNTY OF SEASONS (V. 1)

*“To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven.”*

The very first thing Solomon establishes, beloved, is that there is a divine order to life. The Hebrew word *zeman* means time, or season—it speaks not just of chronological time, but of appointed time, purposed time, God-ordained time.

When God created the world, He didn’t just fling stars into space randomly. Genesis 1:14 tells us He set those lights in the firmament “for signs, and seasons, and for days and years.” “For God is not the author of confusion but of peace” (1 Corinthians 14:33).

But what have we done in our digital age? We have tried to eliminate seasons! We want spring all year round. We want to be available 24/7. We want to harvest without ever having planted. We want to reap without ever having sown.

Listen, church: Your smartphone doesn’t understand seasons! It doesn’t know the difference between work time and family time, between Sabbath and Sunday, between sleeping and waking. But God does! And He’s calling us back to His rhythm.

**Constant stimulation causes mental fatigue.** A constant flow of notifications, messages, and social media updates overloads the brain’s processing capacity. The constant vigilance required to monitor these inputs keeps the mind in a state of high alert, making it difficult to find mental quietude. This state of persistent activation can lead to anxiety and burnout, which are the opposite of the rest and restoration that solitude provides. Psychologist Sherry Turkle notes that when we are always connected, we can become dependent on the validation of others. Rather than developing a secure sense of self, we use other people to prop up a fragile ego, a concept psychoanalyst Donald Winnicott referred to as a “False Self.” This dependency makes being alone uncomfortable, as it removes the source of constant validation.

### II. THE DANCE OF OPPOSITES (VV. 2-8)

Now watch how Solomon unfolds this principle. He gives us fourteen pairs of opposites—twenty-eight different activities that make up the fullness of human experience. But notice something beautiful here: these aren’t contradictions; they’re complementary seasons that work together to create a complete life.

#### A. “A time to be born, and a time to die” (v. 2a)

Every family knows about beginnings and endings. But in our digital age, we’ve lost the art of letting things die. We keep dead conversations on life support

through endless text chains. We refuse to let toxic relationships end because we can still see what they're doing on social media.

Sometimes—people of God—love looks like hitting the “unfollow” button. Sometimes, wisdom means letting that group chat die. Sometimes family health means saying, “This device has served its season, but now it’s time for it to rest.”

### **B. “A time to plant, and a time to pluck what is planted” (v. 2b)**

Oh, this speaks to our souls! In our instant-gratification culture, we want to plant and harvest in the same day. We want to post a picture and get immediate likes. We want to send a message and get an immediate response.

But family relationships are like gardens, beloved. You can’t microwave intimacy. You can’t download deep connection. You can’t stream authentic love.

Ellen White reminds us in her book, *Child Guidance*: “The Lord made Adam and Eve and placed them in the Garden of Eden to dress the garden and keep it for the Lord. It was for their happiness to have some employment, or else the Lord would not have appointed them their work” (White, 1954, p. 345). There’s something about working with your hands, about waiting for seeds to grow, that teaches us patience in a way no digital device ever can.

### **C. “A time to weep, and a time to laugh” (v. 4a)**

Here’s where we get into dangerous territory in our digital age. Social media has created a culture where we only show the highlight reel. We post our laughter, but we hide our tears. We share our victories, but we mask our defeats.

But listen, family: authentic relationships require both seasons. If your children never see you weep, how will they know it’s safe to cry in front of you? If your spouse never sees you struggle, how can they truly understand your strength?

Jesus wept at Lazarus’s tomb (John 11:35), even though He knew He was about to raise him from the dead! Even the Son of God honored the season of sorrow.

The problem with our digital lives is that we try to be “on” all the time. We try to be the same person in every context, at every moment. But God designed us for seasons of joy and seasons of sorrow, seasons of strength and seasons of vulnerability.

### **D. “A time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing” (v. 5b)**

Now we’re getting to the heart of family relationships! Physical affection has seasons, too. There’s a time when your toddler wants to be held constantly, and there’s a time when your teenager needs space. There’s a time for intimate conversation with your spouse, and there’s a time to simply be present together in silence.

But here's what's happening in our digital age: we're embracing our devices when we should be embracing each other, and we're distancing ourselves from our loved ones when we should be drawing near.

Research from the Center for Creative Leadership found that families who establish “device-free zones”—times and spaces where no digital devices are allowed—report significantly higher levels of satisfaction and connection. They create seasons of embrace!

### **E. “A time to keep silence, and a time to speak” (v. 7b)**

Oh family, if we could just learn this one principle, it would revolutionize our families! In our digital age, we think we must respond to everything immediately. We feel compelled to comment on every post, to answer every notification, to have an opinion about everything.

But Solomon says there's a season for silence! Sometimes the most loving thing you can do for your family is to put the phone down and just listen. Sometimes the wisest response to that inflammatory group message is no response at all.

Ellen White counseled in *Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5*: “We must be much in prayer if we would make progress in the divine life. When the message of truth was first proclaimed, how much we prayed. How often was the voice of intercession heard in the chamber, in the barn, in the orchard, or the grove. Frequently we spent hours in earnest prayer, two or three together claiming the promise; often the sound of weeping was heard and then the voice of thanksgiving and the song of praise” (White, 1948, p. 161).

Notice she mentions praying in different places—the chamber, the barn, the orchard. These were seasons of silence, seasons of listening for God's voice. When was the last time your family had a season of digital silence together?

## **THE GREAT DECEPTION: TIME WITHOUT PURPOSE**

But here's where the enemy has been craftiest, beloved. He hasn't just given us digital distractions—he's given us digital distractions that masquerade as productivity, as connection, as purpose.

We scroll through social media and tell ourselves we're “staying connected.” We binge-watch Netflix and call it “family time.” We text instead of talking and convince ourselves we're “communicating.”

But Solomon says there's “a time to every purpose under the heaven.” That word “purpose” in Hebrew is *chephets*—it means delight, desire, God's will being accomplished. Every season should have divine purpose!

Let me ask you, church: What is the divine purpose of spending three hours scrolling through other people's vacation photos? What is the God-ordained goal of arguing with strangers in comment sections? What heavenly objective is accomplished by checking your phone 150 times a day?

Ellen White saw this coming when she wrote: "Angels delight in a home where God reigns supreme, and the children are taught to reverence religion, the Bible, and their Creator. Such families can claim the promise: 'Them that honor Me I will honor' " (White, 1948, p. 424).

## **THE REDEMPTION RHYTHM: GOD'S SOLUTION FOR DIGITAL FAMILIES**

### **I. ESTABLISH SACRED SEASONS**

The first thing we must do as families is to establish sacred seasons—times that are set apart, protected, holy.

#### **THE DAILY RHYTHM:**

- Morning devotions before devices (Psalm 5:3: "My voice you shall hear in the morning, O LORD").
- Family meals without screens (Deuteronomy 8:10: "When you have eaten and are full, then you shall bless the LORD your God").
- Evening prayer and reflection before sleep (Psalm 4:4: "Meditate within your heart on your bed, and be still").
- Ellen White emphasized this in her book, *Child Guidance*: "If ever there was a time when the diet should be of the most simple kind, it is now. Meat should not be placed before our children. Its influence is to excite and strengthen the lower passions and has a tendency to deaden the moral powers" (White, 1954, p. 461).
- Notice she's talking about preparation—creating conditions that help us connect with God and each other. Our digital diet needs the same kind of intentionality!

#### **THE WEEKLY RHYTHM:**

- The Sabbath becomes our great teacher here. From Friday evening to Saturday evening, we practice letting go of our digital striving, our online anxieties, our virtual commitments. We remember that we are human beings, not human doings.

## II. CREATE CONSECRATED SPACES

Just as the tabernacle had different areas for different purposes, our homes need consecrated spaces:

- Bedrooms as sanctuaries for rest and intimacy (no charging stations)!
- Dining rooms as temples of fellowship and gratitude.
- Living areas as spaces for face-to-face conversation and play.

Dr. Larry Rosen's research on "iDisorder" shows that families who create device-free zones in their homes have children with better sleep patterns, improved academic performance, and stronger emotional regulation skills.

## III. CULTIVATE CONTEMPLATIVE HEARTS

The deepest need in our digital age is the need for contemplation—the ability to "Be still and know that I am God" (Psalm 46:10).

Ellen White understood this and shared in the book, *The Desire of Ages*: "It would be well for us to spend a thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ. We should take it point by point, and let the imagination grasp each scene, especially the closing ones. As we thus dwell upon His great sacrifice for us, our confidence in Him will be more constant, our love will be quickened, and we shall be more deeply imbued with His spirit" (White, 1940, p. 83).

Contemplation requires silence. It demands solitude. It insists on seasons of disconnection from the world so we can connect with God.

## PRACTICAL APPLICATIONS: LIVING THE RHYTHM

### FOR PARENTS:

- **Model Digital Sabbaths:** Show your children what it looks like to regularly disconnect from devices and reconnect with God and family.
- **Create Rituals of Transition:** Develop family practices that mark the movement from digital time to sacred time—perhaps a special prayer, a moment of silence, or a symbolic act of putting devices away together.
- **Teach the Art of Presence:** Help your children understand that love is spelled T-I-M-E, and time is more than just being in the same room with your device.

### FOR COUPLES:

- **Establish Communication Seasons:** Have regular times when all devices are put away and you focus solely on each other.

- **Protect Intimacy:** The bedroom should be a sanctuary for rest and connection, not a charging station for devices.
- **Practice Gratitude Together:** Before bed, share three things you're grateful for from the day—and none of them can be digital!

#### **FOR CHILDREN:**

- **Learn the Rhythm Young:** Teach children that just as we have bedtimes for our bodies, we need “bedtimes” for our devices.
- **Develop Alternative Activities:** Fill the non-digital seasons with activities that build character, creativity, and connection—such as reading, crafting, nature walks, and service projects.
- **Understanding Consequences:** Help children see the connection between their digital habits and their emotional, physical, and spiritual well-being.

## **THE PSYCHOLOGICAL DIMENSION: WHAT SCIENCE CONFIRMS**

Modern psychology is catching up to what Solomon knew: human beings are designed for rhythm and purpose.

**Attention Restoration Theory (ART)**, developed by Rachel and Stephen Kaplan, proposes that exposure to nature restores mental fatigue by allowing directed attention to rest and recover, thereby improving cognitive functions such as working memory and attention. This restoration is facilitated by natural environments, which offer “soft fascination,” allowing the mind to wander without demanding effortful concentration. Key elements of ART include the presence of “soft fascination,” a feeling of being away from daily demands, the overall scope of the environment, and an individual's personal “compatibility” with the setting.

**Flow State Research** pioneered by Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi and furthered by psychologists like Jeanne Nakamura, describes the “zone” of peak performance, intense focus, and intrinsic reward. It demonstrates that our deepest satisfaction comes from activities that fully engage our attention in purposeful ways. Digital distraction destroys our ability to enter these meaningful flow states.

**Attachment Theory** reveals that children need consistent, focused attention from caregivers to develop secure attachments. When parents are chronically distracted by devices, children develop anxious attachment styles that affect them for life.

Dr. Catherine Steiner-Adair, author of *The Big Disconnect* (2013) found that children as young as four years old report feeling “sad, mad, angry, and lonely” when their parents are distracted by devices. One child said, “I feel like I’m not important when my mom is looking at her phone.”

## **THE PROPHETIC CALL: A TIME FOR DECISION**

People of God, we are living in prophetic times. Ellen White wrote in *Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 8: “We are living in the closing scenes of this earth’s history. Prophecy is fast fulfilling. The hours of probation are fast passing. We have no time—not a moment—to lose” (White, 1956, p. 252).

If we have no time to lose, then we must be intentional about how we spend our time! We cannot afford to waste these precious hours scrolling mindlessly, arguing online, or allowing digital distractions to steal our focus from what matters eternally.

The enemy knows that if he can fragment our attention, he can destroy our spiritual power. If he can make us slaves to the notification, he can keep us from hearing the still small voice of God.

But we believe God is calling us to be a peculiar people in this digital age—a people who understand seasons, who honor rhythm, who choose connection over distraction, presence over productivity, relationship over entertainment.

## **THE CHALLENGE 30 DAYS OF DIVINE RHYTHM**

We want to challenge every family here today to commit to 30 days of practicing divine rhythm:

### **WEEK 1: ESTABLISH SACRED TIMES**

- Choose one hour each day for completely device-free family time.
- Begin and end each day with prayer before touching any device.
- Implement one device-free meal per day.

### **WEEK 2: CREATE CONSECRATED SPACES**

- Remove all devices from bedrooms.
- Establish one room in your home as a device-free zone.
- Create a family charging station outside of living areas.

### **WEEK 3: CULTIVATE CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICES**

- Spend 15 minutes each day in nature without any devices.
- Practice one minute of silence before each meal after praying for your meal.
- End each day by sharing three things you're grateful for (no digital topics allowed).

### **WEEK 4: EXPAND AND ESTABLISH**

- Implement a weekly digital Sabbath from sundown Friday to sundown Sabbath.
- Plan a device-free family activity each week.
- Teach your children to check in with their hearts before checking their phones.

## **THE PROMISE:**

### **GOD'S BLESSING ON DIVINE ORDER**

We can tell you what happens when families embrace God's rhythm in the digital age:

- **Children grow up secure in their identity**, not seeking validation through likes and comments, but knowing they are fearfully and wonderfully made by the Creator of the universe.
- **Marriages become stronger** as couples rediscover the art of presence, of really seeing each other, of making space for intimacy that can't be interrupted by a notification.
- **Parents become more peaceful** as they stop trying to keep up with the impossible pace of digital life and start walking to the beat of heaven's drum.
- **Families discover joy** in simple pleasures that have been drowned out by the noise of our connected age—the sound of laughter around the dinner table, the peace of reading together in the evening, the satisfaction of working on a project with their hands.

Ellen White declared in her book, *The Adventist Home*: “The more closely the members of a family are united in their work in the home, the more uplifting and helpful will be the influence that father and mother and sons and daughters will exert outside the home” (White, 1952, p. 37).

But we must choose love. We must choose presence. We must choose God's rhythm over the world's rush.

## **CONCLUSION: THE TIME IS NOW**

Family of God, there is a time for everything under heaven. There was a time when our ancestors lived without these digital devices, and they built strong families and deep relationships with God. There may come a time when these devices are taken away from us, and we'll need to know how to connect without them.

But today—today is our time to choose. Today is our season to decide whether we'll be slaves to the screen or servants of a Holy God. Today is our opportunity to reclaim God's rhythm for our families.

The enemy wants us to believe that we don't have a choice, that we're helpless against the pull of digital distraction. But Joshua declared, "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve" (Joshua 24:15), and we're here to tell you that choice is still available to us today!

You can choose to serve the notifications, or you can choose to serve the Lord. You can bow down to the blue light, or you can bow down to the One who is the Light of the world. You can worship at the altar of entertainment, or you can worship at the throne of grace.

Solomon ended this passage in Ecclesiastes by saying, "He has made everything beautiful in its time" (Ecclesiastes 3:11). God wants to make your family life beautiful, but it must happen in His time, according to His rhythm, following His seasons.

The question is not whether you have time for God and family—the question is whether you'll make time for what matters most.

There is a time to scroll, and a time to pray. There is a time to post, and a time to be present. There is a time to connect digitally, and a time to connect spiritually. There is a time to be entertained, and a time to be transformed.

Beloved, the time for transformation is now! The season for change has come! Will you answer the call to return to God's rhythm? Will you lead your family back to divine order? Will you choose heaven's harmony over earth's cacophony?

Let's pray together, and let's commit together to honoring the God of seasons in every season of our lives.

## **CLOSING PRAYER**

*Heavenly Father, we come before You to recognize that we have allowed the urgent to crowd out the important, the immediate to override the eternal. We have traded Your perfect rhythm for the world's restless rush. Forgive us, Lord.*

*We pray for grace to establish new patterns, divine rhythms, holy habits in our families. Help us to discern the times and seasons You have ordained for our lives. Give us wisdom to know when to engage with technology and when to disconnect. Help us to model for our children what it means to walk in step with Your Spirit rather than being driven by the demands of digital devices.*

*We ask for Your blessing on our homes, that they might become sanctuaries of peace in this noisy world. Help us to create spaces where Your voice can be heard above the clamor of notifications and the chatter of entertainment.*

*Lord, we want to be a people who understand seasons, who honor rhythm, who choose Your ways over the world's ways. Make us families that shine like lights in the darkness of this digital age, showing others that there is a better way to live.*

*We commit these next 30 days to You, asking for Your strength to implement the changes You're calling us to make. Help us to be faithful in small things so that You can trust us with greater things.*

*In the precious name of Jesus, our Savior and our example of perfect balance, we pray. Amen.*

*“To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven.” May God help us to live in His perfect timing, for His perfect purposes, in these challenging but hopeful days. Remain encouraged and faithful! Amen, and amen!*

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# WHEN KNOWLEDGE INCREASES: FAMILIES OF FAITH IN A DIGITAL AGE

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BY DELBERT AND SUSAN BAKER

## THE TEXTS:

Daniel 12:4; 1 Thessalonians 5:21; Proverbs 18:15

## INTRODUCTION

Picture a simple scene: A family gathers around the dinner table. The food is hot, the prayer is said, but instead of conversation and laughter, each person bends their head toward a glowing screen. A text buzzes, a notification pings, someone checks a feed, and the moment of togetherness dissolves into digital distraction.

This scene is repeated across the world, in mansions and huts, in bustling cities and rural villages. Technology, once a tool, has become a rival for our attention and affection.

We live in an age Daniel foresaw: “Seal up the scroll until the time of the end. Many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase” (Daniel 12:4). We have more knowledge, more access, more devices than any generation before us.

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**Delbert Baker, PhD, and Susan Baker, DSc** are a ministry team who are seasoned educators, wellness advocates, authors, and an experienced pastoral team. They have served as a ministry team for more than 50 years on multiple continents. Dr. Delbert Baker currently serves as the Director of Research and Development for the Regional Conference Retirement Plan. Dr. Susan Baker, a physical therapist and educator, is retired.

Artificial intelligence (AI), social media, smartphones, and global connectivity are transforming the way we live, work, and interact with one another.

But the question for families of faith is this: *Will technology draw us closer to God and to each other—or will it quietly replace those sacred connections?*

Paul’s counsel is urgent for our time: “Test all things; hold fast what is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). That’s the framework of this message. God calls us, as Adventist families, not to flee from technology in fear, nor to embrace it uncritically, but to test it, redeem it, and use it for His glory.

**Let us examine ways to approach this important subject effectively:**

## **INCREASING KNOWLEDGE AND PROPHECY**

The rapid rise of knowledge is not random; it is prophetic. Daniel’s vision is being fulfilled before our eyes. What once took decades of research to examine and understand can now be accomplished in hours by the use of artificial intelligence. Languages can be translated in seconds. Ideas once locked in libraries are now on our phones.

In his book, Daniel predicted that knowledge would increase as human history progressed. More than 100 years ago, Ellen White expanded on the idea that the explosion of knowledge Daniel predicted would be fulfilled specifically in the last days. (*Signs of the Times*, April 26, 1883). She saw new inventions as providential tools for spreading the gospel, printing presses, railroads, and telegraphs. She did not fear the latest technology of her day. Instead, she asked, “How can we harness these advances for God’s mission?”

That same question is ours today. Families are surrounded by devices. Children learn to swipe before they learn to speak. Parents juggle the demands of work emails, online shopping, and endless notifications. The danger is not just overuse; it is misplaced use. The challenge is not the tool itself but the direction of our hearts.

Solomon’s wisdom is clear: “The heart of the prudent acquires knowledge, and the ear of the wise seeks knowledge” (Proverbs 18:15). In other words, knowledge is good, but it must be guided by wisdom and discernment.

## **PRINCIPLES FOR STRONG FAMILIES**

How can Adventist families remain anchored in God’s Word while navigating a sea of digital change? Three principles can guide us:

## 1. THE OPPORTUNITY MOMENT

“Every advancement in knowledge, every acquisition of power, opens before us new fields of labor and new opportunities to work with God” (White, 1903, p. 262).

Technology offers families fresh opportunities:

- Parents can utilize Bible apps and devotionals to guide family worship.
- Grandparents, if not living close to their grandchildren, can share spiritual values and activities by connecting through texting and video calls.
- Youth can share their testimonies with the click of a button to friends and audiences across their social circles, communities, and the world.
- The opportunity moment is real—but only if families claim it intentionally.

## 2. THE HUMAN AND DIVINE METHOD

God’s way has always been partnership: “Divine power combined with human effort” (White, 1889, p. 538).

- Technology cannot build strong marriages and raise godly children. Apps cannot disciple teenagers. AI cannot produce a Christlike character.
- This is personal spiritual work that requires prayer, discernment, discipline, and the guidance of the Holy Spirit.
- Families must guard against outsourcing spiritual growth to gadgets, video programming and AI.
- Instead, they should let digital tools supplement, not replace, individual time, personal devotion, and family worship.

## 3. The Glory Principle

“Does it bring glory to God? Does it lead minds to Him?” (White, 1930, p. 398).

- This principle is simple yet searching; it can apply to every area of life and to every device available. Before we click, scroll, or download, we must ask:
- Does this, and can this, device and content honor God?
- Does this activity build family faith or break it down?
- Does this use of technology make us more like Jesus or more like the world?
- The Glory Principle is a practical filter families can intentionally incorporate. It is something that can be
- practiced, taught, and modeled to adults, youth, and even young children. If it doesn’t bring glory to God,
- it doesn’t deserve our time or attention.

## **TECHNOLOGY AS A SERVANT, NOT A MASTER**

When wisely managed, technology can bless and enrich family faith and spirituality. Consider these possibilities:

### **1. ENHANCING BIBLE STUDY**

AI-driven tools can help families explore Scripture in new ways, with cross-references, historical context, and study plans. A grieving parent can quickly find every verse that offers comfort from God. A curious teenager can compare Bible translations. Technology can deepen our understanding of God’s Word and provide us with new perspectives to enliven our faith.

### **2. STRENGTHENING FAMILY WORSHIP**

Families can use digital devotionals, Scripture songs, or guided prayer apps. Parents can create “tech-assisted” worship, using a screen to show a Bible video clip, then putting the device down to discuss and pray together. The key is intentionality: the device serves the worship, not the other way around.

### **3. SUPPORTING CHARACTER DEVELOPMENT**

James compares God’s Word to a mirror (James 1:23–25). Technology can act as a modern mirror, prompting self-reflection and accountability. Journaling apps, reminders to pray, or shared family gratitude lists may cultivate spiritual habits. Yet no app can replace the transforming power of Christ. Tools can support, but only Jesus saves, and the Holy Spirit enlightens.

### **4. ADVANCING THE THREE ANGELS’ MESSAGES**

Revelation challenges us to take the everlasting gospel “*to every nation, tribe, language, and people.*” Technology accelerates this mission:

- Adventist media translated instantly into multiple languages.
- Online evangelism reaching closed countries.
- Content designed for different learning styles and cultures.

The Bible writers who penned Scripture could not have imagined how God’s Word could be distributed around the world with the click of a button on a phone or laptop. The ones and zeroes of computer coding have replaced papyrus and ancient ink. The digital tools we have today can help to finish the work of spreading the Gospel faster than ever. Families can be part of this by sharing truth through their own platforms.

## DANGERS FAMILIES NEED TO AVOID

### 1. SHORTCUTS TO CHARACTER

There is no app for sanctification. No AI system can produce holiness. Jesus said, “Man shall not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God” (Matthew 4:4). Technology can facilitate learning, but it is the Holy Spirit who applies the Word to our hearts and minds. Families, as well as each believer, must guard against the misperception that spiritual growth can be automated.

### 2. ABDICATING SPIRITUAL THINKING

Technology can never replace discernment. Families cannot allow AI or media to think for them. Spiritual laziness regarding the use of technology will surely erode faith. Rather than allowing the indiscriminate use of technology, responsible parents will lead their families in thoughtful, prayerful choices.

### 3. GULLIBLE CONSUMPTION

AI can generate falsehoods, deepfakes, and misinformation. Social media can push biases and distort the truth. Children are exposed to moral confusion, harmful images, and addictive patterns. Families must teach vigilance. Paul urges: “Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt” (Colossians 4:6). Families need the courage to reject harmful content and protect their homes.

## BALANCED SPIRITUAL TECH PRACTICES

How can families thrive spiritually while living in a tech-saturated world? Here are five practices:

- **Pray Before You Plug In** – Begin each day by asking: “*Lord, guide how we use these tools today.*” Make prayer the family’s first connection.
- **Discern then Discuss Together** – Families should openly talk about what they watch, read, and consume. Shared reflection cultivates wisdom and accountability.
- **Innovate for Ministry Outreach** – Use tech creatively: livestream a Bible study, share an encouraging verse on social media, design worship playlists, or create short testimonies. Let your family’s digital footprint point to Christ.
- **Integrate Tech and Non-Tech to Deepen Spiritual Growth** – Use technology to enhance, not replace, worship, family devotions, and personal study. Use it and then don’t use it; try mixing up digital devices with just reading from

a hard copy Bible. Try a “digital free Sabbath” periodically, setting devices aside to focus on God and one another.

- **Set Healthy Boundaries** – Parents must model healthy tech use. Establish screen-free zones at meals, during worship, and at bedtime. It may not be easy, but the end will justify the efforts invested. Boundaries protect what matters most.

## ADVENTIST MOVEMENT AND FAMILIES

One can reasonably assume that Ellen White would support the use of modern technology for the benefit of others and the cause of good if she were alive today. In referring to how advances could be used in God’s work, she declared: “New methods must be introduced. God’s people must awake to the necessities of the time in which they are living” (White, 1946, p. 70).

We are living in that prophetic moment. Technology is here to stay. The question is not *whether* we will use it, but *how* we will use it. Like Paul, we are called to become “all things to all men, that I might by all means save some” (1 Corinthians 9:22). Our methods can change, but our message cannot.

The increase of knowledge is a providential challenge. Families of faith must rise with wisdom, courage, and creativity. AI and digital tools are not ultimate threats nor ultimate saviors; they are tests and opportunities. If surrendered to God, they can help us prepare people for Christ’s return.

## A CLOSING WORD...

Recently, we spoke with a 19-year-old young woman. She made a serious statement that stuck with us. She said, “*It is not easy to be a young person today!*” Simply stated, but profoundly true. There are avenues for attack on today’s youth that we have not seen before, and technology is at the top of the list!

In summary of this important subject, we share these concluding ideas that can help parents and guardians to be successful as they partner with children, youth, and persons of all ages to use technology responsibly.

*First, Reasonably Talk About It:* Like any good instruction, repetition is better than a one-time lecture. Make conversations about using technology ongoing and not just when the kids are in trouble for their usage! If children understand why boundaries are important, they will be less likely to view parental input as a desire for control to be resisted.

*Second, Model Your Message:* Ensure that children see you modeling wise technology use. They will immediately pick up on the hypocrisy if you are always

viewing content on a device, even if it is for work. Keeping technology limited is a good way to signal to the entire family that they are valuable to you and that you place a premium on spending time with them.

*Then, Put Safeguards in Place: Don't be hesitant to put parental controls and filters on your children's devices. Period. You would not stand by and watch someone throw a grenade into your home; why would you let the media be unmonitored? There must be follow-up with all good intentions; follow-through with a strategy, and follow-on with affirmations.*

*Finally, Use Grace and Gentleness with Firmness: Be gentle, not overbearing. The Bible encourages parents to "not provoke your children, lest they become discouraged" (Colossians 3:21). Learning is a process, and kids will make mistakes, just as parents do. Foster a spirit that builds trust and reinforces children for being honest. Resilience is built through failing and trying again. Don't be too hard. And, ask the Holy Spirit for continual guidance.*

## **CONCLUSION:**

### **FAMILIES THAT SHINE IN THE DIGITAL AGE**

The goal is to be a family that has technology where it serves but never rules. May children know the joy of Sabbath walks more than endless scrolling. May our worships and devotions be enriched by tools but not replaced by them. May parents teach discernment, grandparents share wisdom, and Christ remain the Center.

This is possible, not by rejecting technology, nor by bowing to it, but by redeeming it for God's glory.

Daniel's prophecy has come true: knowledge has increased. But as Paul reminds us, wisdom must rise with it: *"Test all things; hold fast what is good."*

Families of faith, let us rise to this prophetic moment!

Let us use every tool, every device, every invention as servants of the gospel, not masters of our souls. Let us stay connected to God, to one another, and to the mission before us.

And finally, may our homes be filled with faith and love, shine as beacons of hope in a world distracted by screens but desperate for truth. And may our homes be places of light, truth, and hope, preparing for heaven and eternity.

## **APPEAL\***

Will you commit, as a family, to let Christ, not technology, be the center of your home?

Will you covenant together to use these tools for God's glory, to set boundaries, and to grow closer to Him in this digital age?

If so, let's lift our eyes from our screens and turn our hearts toward heaven, where no signal ever drops, and where the connection is eternal!

*\*Optional for Appeal: Use the Family Covenant for Faith and Technology (in appendix).*

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## **A FAMILY COVENANT FOR FAITH AND TECHNOLOGY**

*Our family seeks to honor God with our use of technology.*

*To do so, we covenant to **CONNECT** to God through this Covenant...*

### **COMMITMENT TO STANDARDS**

We will use technology to strengthen our faith. We will ensure that what we watch or listen to conforms to the Philippians 4:8 standard of what is true, honorable, just, pure, lovely, commendable, excellent, and worthy of praise.

### **OBSERVE HEALTHY BOUNDARIES**

We will set limits to the time we spend with devices, so that they don't control us and the time we spend with each other; technology will serve, not dominate us.

### **NURTURE TOGETHERNESS**

When possible, we will use technology together as a family-bonding experience through watching, playing, or listening together to build and advance our knowledge as a family.

### **NAVIGATE WITH WISDOM**

We will guard our minds so that the technology we consume does not open the door to evil, immoral, or ungodly ideas that dishonor God or compromise Christian principles.

### **EMBRACE REAL-LIFE BALANCE**

Our family will prioritize time together that is screen-free, including outdoor activities, reading, service to others, and family projects.

### **COMMUNICATE WITH LOVE**

We will speak with love to each other, about each other, and about other people in all our digital interactions. This means using technology to reflect kindness and courtesy, rather than bullying, gossiping, or digital trolling.

### **TRUST IN GRACE AND GROWTH**

If we violate this Covenant, we will extend forgiveness and grace to one another. As a family, we will discuss our struggles and victories honestly and pray for each other. Growth in grace will be our goal as we mature together.

## SERMON OUTLINE:

### When Knowledge Increases: Families of Faith in a Digital Age

Texts: Daniel 12:4; 1 Thessalonians 5:21; Proverbs 18:15

#### INTRODUCTION

- Family dinner scene: prayer, food, but heads bowed to screens.
- Technology — rival for attention, affection, spiritual formation.
- Daniel foresaw this: “*Knowledge shall increase.*”
- Question: Will technology connect us to God and each other or replace sacred connections?
- Key text: “*Test all things; hold fast what is good.*”
- Paul’s counsel is urgent for our time: “Test all things; hold fast what is good” (1 Thessalonians 5:21). That’s the framework of this message. God calls us, as Adventist families, not to flee from technology in fear, nor to embrace it uncritically, but to test it, redeem it, and use it for His glory.

#### I. INCREASING KNOWLEDGE AND PROPHECY

- Daniel’s prophecy fulfilled: AI, instant translation, global connectivity.
- Ellen White: knowledge increase fulfilled in last days (*Signs of the Times*, April 26, 1883).
- She embraced new tools (printing press, telegraph) for mission.
- Principle: The issue is not the tool itself, but the direction of our hearts.
- “The heart of the prudent acquires knowledge...” (Prov. 18:15).

#### II. PRINCIPLES FOR STRONG FAMILIES

- **The Opportunity Moment** (*Education*, 1903, p. 262)  
Bible apps for worship.  
Grandparents connect spiritually via calls.  
Youth share testimony with a click.
- **The Human and Divine Method** (*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, 1889, p. 538)  
Tech cannot build character or raise disciples.  
Requires prayer, Holy Spirit, personal effort.  
Tools must supplement, not replace, devotion and worship.
- **The Glory Principle** (*Messages to Young People*, 1930, p. 398)  
*Ask: Does this honor God?*  
*Does this build or break family faith?*  
If it doesn’t glorify God, it doesn’t deserve our time.

#### III. TECHNOLOGY AS SERVANT, NOT MASTER

- **Bible Study** – AI tools uncover context, cross-references.

- **Family Worship** – Tech-assisted, but Christ at center.
- **Character Growth** – Journals, reminders, gratitude lists.
- **Mission** – Gospel to “every nation, tribe, language, people” (Rev. 14:6).

#### IV. DANGERS FAMILIES MUST AVOID

- **Shortcuts to Character** – No app produces holiness (Matt. 4:4).
- **Abdicating Spiritual Thinking** – Tech can’t think for us; discernment needed.
- **Gullible Consumption** – Beware falsehoods, deepfakes, moral pollution (Col. 4:6).

#### V. BALANCED SPIRITUAL TECH PRACTICES

- Pray before you plug in.
- Discern and discuss as a family.
- Innovate for ministry outreach.
- Mix tech and non-tech for spiritual growth.
- Try “digital free Sabbaths.”
- Set healthy boundaries.
- Screen-free meals, worship, bedtime.

#### VI. ADVENTIST MOVEMENT AND FAMILIES

- Ellen White: “New methods must be introduced...” (*Evangelism*, 1946, p. 70).
- Paul: “All things to all men, that I might save some.” (1 Cor. 9:22).
- Families called to rise with wisdom, courage, creativity.
- Tech: neither savior nor enemy — a test and an opportunity.
- Practical Counsel to Parents
- **Talk reasonably and often.** Ongoing, not only when in trouble.
- **Model the message.** Children follow what we do.
- **Put safeguards in place.** Filters, limits, accountability.
- **Use grace and gentleness with firmness.** (Col. 3:21).

#### CONCLUSION & APPEAL

- Goal: Families where tech serves but never rules.
- Children treasure Sabbath walks over endless scrolling.
- Worship enriched by tools, but Christ remains the center.
- Daniel’s prophecy fulfilled — knowledge is increased.
- Paul’s counsel remains: “Test all things; hold fast what is good.”
- Appeal: Families, will you covenant to keep Christ—not technology—at the center of your home?
- Invitation: Lift our eyes from our screens and turn our hearts toward heaven, where no signal ever drops and the connection is eternal.

# GUARDING OUR HOMES: HELPING FAMILIES MANAGE THE INTRUSION OF TECHNOLOGY

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BY CÉSAR AND CAROLANN DE LEÓN

## THE TEXT:

Romans 12:2

## INTRODUCTION

We live in a digital age where technology is no longer just a tool—it has become the very environment in which we exist. Smartphones, social media, video games, and endless online content are now constant companions. Families no longer simply live in homes; they live in digital ecosystems.

Technology has brought blessings, including easier communication, access to knowledge, and ministry opportunities. But it has also brought dangers: addiction, distraction, broken family bonds, and moral corruption. One-third of teens say they have chosen to speak with AI instead of a real person during

serious moments. Of those teens, 31% report finding those conversations equally or more satisfying than talking with a peer. In one industry study, over 80% of Gen Z respondents indicated that they would consider marrying an AI companion in the future (Knutsson, 2025).

Ellen G. White, though she lived in a pre-digital era, foresaw these principles. She warned in her book, *The Great Controversy*: “Satan is constantly preparing inducements to attract minds from the solemn work of preparation for the scenes just before us” (White, 1911, p. 342). What are today’s inducements? Our glowing screens, the endless scrolling, the entertainment that numbs the soul.

This sermon aims to support families in managing the intrusion of technology—not by rejecting it altogether, but by stewarding it wisely and keeping Christ at the center of the home.

## THE SUBTLE POWER OF TECHNOLOGY

### 1. THE SILENT INTRUDER

Technology rarely barges into our lives loudly. It slips in quietly. One app. One notification. One “harmless” distraction. Soon, hours vanish. Family dinners vanish. Conversations vanish.

Paul warned in Ephesians 5:15-16, “Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise, making the most of every opportunity, because the days are evil.”

Ellen White echoes this truth in *Christ’s Object Lessons*: “Our time belongs to God. Every moment is His, and we are under the most solemn obligation to improve it to His glory” (White, 1900, p. 342).

If time is God’s gift, how much of it have we given away to screens?

### 2. THE FORMATION OF HEARTS AND MINDS

Technology is not neutral. Every platform, every algorithm is designed to shape our habits, our desires, our view of the world.

Proverbs 4:23: “Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.”

Ellen White warned in *The Great Controversy*: “It is a law both of the intellectual and the spiritual nature that by beholding we become changed.” (White, 1911, p. 555).

What are our children beholding? Hours of YouTube scrolling? TikTok dances? Violent games? If by beholding we become changed, then technology is discipling our children faster than we are.

## GOD'S DESIGN FOR FAMILIES

### 1. FAMILIES AS THE FIRST DISCIPLESHIP SPACE

God ordained the family as the primary place for faith formation. Deuteronomy 6:6-7: “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.”

Notice the rhythm—life together, conversation, teaching, relationship. This is how faith is passed on. But when every family member is lost in their own device, there is no room left for those conversations.

And when families sit together in silence, each staring at their device, there are not enough loving conversations to impress God's Word upon developing hearts.

Ellen White writes in the book, *Adventist Home*, “Gentle manners, cheerful conversation, and loving acts will bind the hearts of children to their parents by the silken chords of affection and will do more to make home attractive than the rarest ornaments that can be bought for gold” (White, 1952, pp. 426–427).

The question is sobering: Has the smartphone replaced the Bible as the center of the home?

### 2. REDEEMING THE TIME

Ephesians 5:15,16: “See then that you walk circumspectly, not as fools but as wise, redeeming the time, because the days are evil.”

Ellen White wrote in *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*: “Many are eagerly engaged in the pursuit of pleasure. Their principal study is how to secure the gratification of self, how to obtain the maximum of pleasure and enjoyment” (White, 1913, p. 347). If these words were penned in the 1800s about novels and amusements of that time, how much more do those words apply to Netflix binges and endless scrolling today?

We cannot deny that we are living in an increasingly dangerous season of our earth's history. Self-gratification and all hedonistic pursuits have become the norm. Yet amid this pleasure-seeking culture, God lovingly grants all parents His abundant grace and gives them the opportunity to redeem the time they have lost in leading, training, and discipling their precious children and teens. Ellen White writes in *Child Guidance*, “The youth of our day are ignorant of Satan's devices. Parents should therefore be awake in these perilous times, working with perseverance and industry, to shut out the first approach of the foe. They should instruct their children when sitting in the house, or walking by the way, when rising up or lying down” (White, 1954, p. 474).

### 3. PRIORITIZING PRESENCE

Jesus' ministry was rooted in presence. He gave those he encountered eye-to-eye contact and touched their wounds. Christ was attuned to their heart longings and desires. "He passed by no human being as worthless, but sought to apply the healing remedy to every soul" (White, 1905, p. 25).

Today, technology can rob us of presence. We are "together-ish" but not genuinely present and emotionally available for each other. It is difficult, if not impossible, to be connected and emotionally attuned to one another, while we are concomitantly emotionally attached, physically tethered, and mentally attuned to our devices.

"Parents should guard their children from those influences," wrote White in the book, *Child Guidance*, "which would lead them away from God. This is their sacred duty" (White, 1954, p. 114). Today, that sacred duty includes allowing God to give us the wisdom to guide our children and teens in the wise use of technology—that, left unchecked, can isolate rather than unite the hearts of families to God and to one another.

## THE DANGERS OF UNCHECKED TECHNOLOGY

### 1. ADDICTION AND IDOLATRY

Many studies show that technology can affect the brain much like addictive substances. Phone apps are engineered to be addictive. Notifications trigger dopamine release. Games are designed to keep players hooked. Social media manipulates our sense of worth through likes and shares.

Parents can intentionally remind their beloved children, through the seasons of their growth and development, that their worth and value must be grounded in the unrelenting love of God. Our children and teens need to be reminded regularly that they are God's precious, beloved treasures and that nothing social media or their peers say or believe about them can change God's love or the value He places on them.

Exodus 20:3, "You shall have no other gods before Me."

White's warning in *Testimonies to the Church* is timeless: "Nothing is more treacherous than the deceitfulness of sin. It is the unsuspected, unsuspecting indulgence in trifling things that saps spiritual power" (White, 1889, p. 540).

Trifling things—five more minutes on social media, one more video, only four more episodes to the end of the season—slowly, unconsciously, spiritual muscles are being sapped.

## 2. BREAKDOWN OF COMMUNICATION

Marriages are weakened when couples spend more time on screens than in open-hearted conversation. Children feel neglected and invisible when parents are physically present but emotionally absent, eyes glued to glowing rectangles.

James 1:19 calls us to be “quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to become angry.” But genuine listening in our households cannot happen if our ears are plugged with earbuds and our eyes are glued to screens.

Ellen White urged in the *Adventist Home*: “The family circle should be the very center of affection” (White, 1952, p. 210). Devices often fracture that circle. Our devices can imperceptibly become the centers of our affection, while family relationships become more detached and disconnected.

## 3. EXPOSURE TO CORRUPTION

Technology can indeed be used to uplift Jesus and connect others to His Good News Gospel. However, when our children and youth have unfiltered access to the internet, they are exposed to mind, body, soul, and relationship-destroying pornography, violence, bullying, false ideologies, and seductive spiritual deceptions.

1 Peter 5:8 warns us: “Be alert and of sober mind. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour.”

Again, sister White warned in *Messages to Young People*: “The readers of frivolous, exciting tales become unfitted for the duties lying before them. They live an unreal life and have no desire to search the Scriptures” (White, 1930, p. 273).

Replace “tales” with “social media feeds,” and the warning is eerily modern and relevant.

Today, our enemy is masterfully prowling and devouring the minds, bodies, and souls of adults and youth, through pixels. We must be alert to the reality that he has perfected strategies and schemes by which he has been able to distort our perspectives of God, others, and ourselves. He has discovered masterful methods to wean our affections for God as we transfer them onto the relationships we have developed with technology.

As parents become more intentional about seeking divine wisdom to know how they can successfully provide emotionally and spiritually nurturing alternatives to the hours of time their children spend on their phones, the Holy Spirit will continue to ignite a desire for personal spiritual revival that can swell into a spiritual revival within the family. Through their enthusiastic and joyful example, parents can invite their children into a sweet and meaningful experience of personal and family prayer rituals, as well as daily rhythms of Scripture reading and meditation—perhaps even on a phone app. Brief and highly interesting morning and evening family worship rituals—by God’s

grace—can become moments of deep connection and affection that the whole family can look forward to.

## SEVEN STRATEGIES FOR FAMILIES

### 1. ESTABLISH CHRIST-CENTERED BOUNDARIES

Prayerfully consider setting specific times and places where technology is not allowed. Before setting family rules, share your desire to connect more deeply with your family and with God. Share the many benefits of mental, physical, spiritual, and relational health that will follow when families spend less time on screens and more meaningful time connecting joyously with each other.

Examples of protective family rules could be; no phones at dinner, no devices in bedrooms, and family worship before measured screen time. When bedrooms become device-free zones, children and youth can replenish and recharge their brains and bodies which require adequate sleep for optimal function and development. When dinner tables become a sanctuary for open-hearted conversations, the family's love and affection—for each other and for God—can blossom and flourish.

As Joshua 24:15 declares: “As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord.” Serving the Lord means protecting sacred family spaces from non-essential distractions.

### 2. MODEL HEALTHY HABITS

Parents must lead by example. When children see parents constantly scrolling, they will follow suit. Instead, let them see you enjoying time outdoors, joyfully helping those in need, reading Scripture, and engaging in prayer journaling. Schedule in “family fun time” to play together, take walks, or engage in a home or community task or project together.

Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 11:1, “Follow my example, as I follow the example of Christ.”

White wrote in the book, *Child Guidance*: “Great responsibilities rest upon parents, and they should strive earnestly to fulfill their God-appointed mission. When they see the need of bending all the energies of the being to the work of training their children for God, a great deal of the frivolity and unnecessary pretense that is now seen will be put away. They will consider no sacrifice or toil too great that will enable them to prepare to meet the Lord with joy. This is a most precious part of their service as followers of God, and one that they cannot afford to neglect” (White, 1954, p. 478).

### 3. RECLAIM AND PRACTICE SABBATH REST

God commanded His people to rest—not just from work, but from the things that consume mind, body, and soul. Families would greatly benefit from digital Sabbaths: an entire day(s) without devices, dedicated to holistic rest, creative worship, and meaningful family relationship building—benevolent service to the hurting in our communities. The Sabbath is God’s weekly opportunity for a technology detox.

Also in the book, *Child Guidance*, “The Sabbath—oh!—make it the sweetest, the most blessed day of the whole week. . . Parents can and should give attention to their children, reading to them the most attractive portions of Bible history, educating them to reverence the Sabbath day, keeping it according to the commandment. This cannot be done if the parents feel no burden to interest their children. But they can make Sabbath a delight if they will take the proper course. The children can be interested in good reading or in conversation about the salvation of their souls. But they will have to be educated and trained. The natural heart does not love to think of God, of heaven, or of heavenly things. There must be a continual pressing back of the current of worldliness and inclination to evil and a letting in of heavenly light.” (White, 1954, pp. 532–533).

Families can also practice digital Sabbaths, laying aside devices to worship, rest, and reconnect in ways that will restore and replenish mind, body, and soul. Parents involve their children and youth in generating a variety of creative Sabbath activities that everyone will enjoy. Activities that involve serving others and bringing the love and sunshine of Jesus into the lives of those in your local community, who need to experience God’s extravagant love, are of particular interest to children and youth. It will take time and effort to plan and execute uplifting Sabbath activities, but including the whole family in planning will result in a greater blessing for all.

### 4. TEACH DISCERNMENT

Equip children to recognize the difference between entertainment and edification. These daily, warm, and connecting conversations can take place during, before, or after short and interesting family worship times to discuss the pros and cons of common entertainment and recreational activities.

Teach them to ask, “*Is this good for my soul? Does this glorify God?*”

Philippians 4:8 offers God’s wise filter: “Whatever is true... noble... pure... think about such things.”

White writes in *Messages to Young People*, “Satan makes special efforts to lead them [the youth] to find happiness in worldly amusements, and to justify themselves by endeavoring to show that these amusements are harmless, innocent, and even important for health. He presents the path of holiness as difficult, while the paths of worldly pleasures are strewn with flowers” (White, 1930, p. 367).

## 5. REPLACE, DON'T JUST REMOVE

If you take technology away without offering healthy alternatives, resentment can grow. Instead, replace screen time with alternative family activities, such as family board games, outdoor recreational activities, community-serving activities, and lively, stimulating family worship activities. Looking beyond the family circle and identifying ways the family can be a blessing to the community can result in transformational benefits for every member of the family. Families with children of the same age can also gather to enjoy spreading God's love as they work together on community service projects.

Families really do grow together when they work together, play together, pray together, and serve together.

In *Child Guidance*, White wrote, "Let parents devote time to their families, talking with their children, and teaching them how to live in order to please God" (White, 1954, p. 475). The benefits of following these wise words will be seen here and through eternity.

## 6. FOSTER ACCOUNTABILITY

Installing filters and monitoring software is always a good idea, but also focus on creating a family culture of openness. Encourage children and youth to talk about what they see online. Create spaces for open-hearted conversations to take place, where confession and guidance without fear will foster a safe family environment where everyone feels seen, heard, and understood, yet loved enough to be compassionately guided and corrected as needed. Children and youth who experience the ongoing flow of God's grace, compassion, mercy, and forgiveness through their parents will experience less pressure to hide or deceive their parents.

Galatians 6:2, "Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ."

In the book, *Child Guidance*, White also writes: "Make the lessons of Christ's Word plain to your children, and impress upon them the necessity of being truthful and of opening the mind to parents" (White, 1954, p. 173).

## 7. KEEP THE GOSPEL AT THE CENTER

Above all, remind your family that technology is a tool, *not* a savior. The world offers endless updates, but only Christ makes us new. Social media may give followers, but only Jesus calls us His friends. As parents make Jesus their friend and life companion, their children's joy and passion for Jesus will grow and blossom into an authentic relationship with God and with others.

In *Heavenly Places*, Ellen White writes, "Keep Christ before your children by singing songs to His glory, by seeking Him in prayer, and by reading from His

Word, so that He will seem to them an ever-present Guest. Then they will love Him, and will be brought so closely in unison with Him that they will breathe out His Spirit. They will feel *a new relationship* to one another in Christ.” (White, 1967, italics applied).

## ILLUSTRATIONS

**The Lost Dinner Table:** A father once said, “We don’t eat dinner together anymore. Everyone grabs their plate and retreats to their room with their phone. We live in the same house, but we’re strangers.” Compare that to Psalm 128:3, which describes the family table as a place of blessing: “Your children will be like olive shoots around your table.”

**The Modern Prodigal:** Many prodigals today don’t wander into faraway cities—they get lost in digital worlds. But the Father still waits at the window, longing for His children to come home—not just physically, but emotionally and spiritually.

**Jesus and Interruptions:** In Mark 5, Jesus was on His way to heal Jairus’s daughter when He was interrupted by a bleeding woman. He didn’t see it as an intrusion, but as a ministry. We must not let technology rob us of the holy interruptions God is providentially allowing into our lives.

## A CALL TO FAMILIES

Families must wake up. Technology is not in and of itself, evil, but if left unchecked, it will disciple our children faster than we will.

Parents, reclaim your God-given authority. Husbands and wives, put down your devices and hold each other’s hands, look into the eyes of your children when they speak. Initiate open-hearted conversations with each other. Children, honor your parents by listening when they speak, instead of staring at your screens.

The world is shouting through technology, but God often whispers. If we want to hear His voice, we must be still, put the phone down, and attune to His love displayed throughout His Word.

Ellen White’s words in *Child Guidance* echo like a trumpet: “Parents should guard the avenues of the soul; for everything that is calculated to corrupt the morals will surely do it.” (White, 1954, p. 114).

Every family member must guard the soul avenues—eyes, ears, hearts—from the evolving digital invasion that, used indiscriminately, can snuff out spiritual commitment and devotion to God and His love-driven service for others.

## CONCLUSION

Joshua declared: “Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve... But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15).

Today, families must make that same choice. Who will be worshipped? Christ or the screen. Eternal values and rewards or temporary pixels.

Technology can be an excellent servant but a terrible master.

If Christ is the Lord of our minds and hearts, *then* technology will take its rightful place—as a tool to glorify God, not as an idol that consumes our minds, hearts, souls, and our families.

May the love of Christ, displayed in our family relationships, shine brighter than all screens.

The Lord has promised to empower us with a new, spiritually responsive heart if we seek his presence in our lives. Through the prophet Ezekiel the Lord promised:

“Then I will sprinkle clean water on you, and you will be clean. Your filth will be washed away, and you will no longer worship idols. And I will give you a new heart, and I will put a new spirit in you. I will take out your stony, stubborn heart and give you a tender, responsive heart. And I will put my Spirit in you so that you will follow my decrees and be careful to obey my regulations” (Ezekiel 36:25-27).

This is the promise; we are not alone in the fight against the evils that can enter our homes through the technologies available on our screens. The Lord has promised to place His Spirit in us, to give us a new heart and empower us to walk in His ways, so that we can have the wisdom and inclination to seek and desire only what is “true, and honorable, and right, and pure, and lovely, and admirable. Think about things that are excellent and worthy of praise” (Philippians 4:8 NLT).

Daniel faced Babylon’s many temptations as a youth, but the Word of God tells us, “But Daniel was determined not to defile himself . . .” (Daniel 1:8).

As Daniel determined to not defile himself, I invite you to do the same. Parents, youth, and adults of all ages, I invite each one of you to be determined to protect your mind and your heart while navigating modern technology.

Parents, may God enable you to model and display Christ’s healing love to every member of your family, first and foremost—and *also* to every precious soul God puts in your sphere of influence—so that we *all—as a united family in Christ*—will anticipate the day Christ will lead us to our heavenly home, where nothing corruptible and destructive will ever touch our minds our souls and our families, ever again.

## CLOSING PRAYER

*“Lord, we confess that we have allowed technology to occupy too much of our time, minds, hearts and families. Forgive us for the times we have chosen screens over Scripture, devices over discipleship, and worthless entertainment over meaningful engagement with one another. Help us to reclaim our time, our priorities, our conversations, our attention and authentic love for You. Teach us to use technology wisely for Your glory, for sharing your transformative love, and for the edification of our families and communities. May Your Word and Your presence be central in our hearts and homes. May our families be places of joy and peace where love is practiced, and where Your presence is more satisfying than any screen. In Jesus’ name we pray, Amen.”*

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\* Recent research conducted by Common Sense Media (April and May 2025), in which they surveyed teens aged 13-17 years, found that a significant percentage said that their conversations with AI companions were “as satisfying or more satisfying” than talking with real friends.

# CHILDREN'S STORIES

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*Children's Stories* may be used for special family Sabbaths. Use props and materials that are easily available to you that can help to illustrate the story.

- **HOW DO YOU SPEND YOUR TIME?** .....47  
This story reminds us to start each day with Jesus and choose what matters most.
- **“WELL, NAH!” JO-NAH** .....50  
This story shows that real peace comes when we spend time alone with God.
- **THE MIRROR JUST FOR YOU!** .....54  
Through this story we learn that God’s commandments help us live joyfully.
- **MANDY, THE GOOD INFLUENCER** .....56  
This story inspires us to shine online by sharing kindness and God’s love.

# HOW DO YOU SPEND YOUR TIME?

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BY DAWN JACOBSON-VENN

**TEXT:**  
**PHILIPPIANS 4:8, NIV**

**PROPS:**  
Tablet or iPad

It was Sunday morning, and the sun peeked through Ella's curtains. She stretched, yawned, and reached for her tablet. *"Just one show before breakfast,"* she told herself. But one show turned into two. And then three. By the time Ella put her tablet down, her cereal was soggy, and it was almost time to leave for Ella's Adventurer Club meeting.

*"Ella!"* her mom called. *"Did you read your Sabbath School Bible lesson yet?"* *"Not yet!"* Ella said, grabbing her shoes. *"I ran out of time!"* Her mom smiled kindly. *"Sometimes we run out of time for the things that matter most when we don't spend our time wisely."* Ella looked down. *"I guess I did spend a lot of time watching my favorite show."*

Her mom nodded. *"We can ask Jesus to help us choose what's best. That's what Philippians 4:8 is all about—thinking about things that are good and true and lovely."* Ella thought to herself, *"Maybe Jesus can help me tomorrow."*

After Adventurers, Mom took Ella and her best friend, Grace, to the park to play and have a picnic. Grace was the first one out of the car, and she called to Ella, *"Let's play! I brought my new jump rope!"* Ella smiled and ran to join her.

They played and jumped rope until they were out of breath. Then they sat under a tree, eating sandwiches and grapes, talking and giggling.

Grace pulled out her tablet. *“Want to see a funny video?”* The girls watched for a few seconds, but the video showed people making fun of others. Ella felt something uncomfortable in her heart. *“Grace,”* she said softly, *“I don’t think this is kind.”* Grace frowned. *“It’s just a joke!”* Ella thought about what her mom had said that morning. *Whatever is lovely... whatever is pure.* She took a deep breath. *“I think I’d rather do something else. Want to draw flowers with me?”* Grace hesitated, then smiled. *“Okay!”*

Soon they were drawing with sticks in the dirt, making hearts, flowers, and smiley faces. *“This is way better,”* said Grace. Ella nodded. *“Yeah, it makes my heart feel happy instead of sad.”*

That evening, Ella got ready for bed. She picked up her children’s Bible and her Sabbath School lesson from her nightstand. *“Jesus,”* she prayed, *“please help me spend my time on good things—things that make me more like You.”* As she opened her Bible, Philippians 4:8 caught her eye. She thought to herself, this is the verse Mom was talking about this morning. She whispered the verse aloud: ***“Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things.”*** Ella smiled. *“That’s what I want to fill my heart with.”* She thought about her day—playing with Grace, drawing, and choosing not to watch something that was not good. Her day hadn’t been perfect, but she had tried. And Jesus had helped her.

The next morning, Ella woke up early again. This time, before she even reached for her tablet, she paused. *“What should I do first?”* she asked herself. She thought for a minute and knew what she should do: *Put Jesus first.* She reached for her Bible and Sabbath School lesson and read about Jesus feeding the five thousand. She imagined the boy who shared his lunch and how happy Jesus must have been with that good choice.

After she finished reading, she prayed, *“Thank You, Jesus, for helping me start my day with You.”* Then she drew a picture of the story—the little boy, the fish, and the bread. She couldn’t wait to show her mom. Just then, her mom came in, and Ella said, *“Look! I spent my time with Jesus first!”* Her mom gave her a big hug. *“That makes my heart so happy, Ella, and it makes Jesus happy too. When we choose good things—things that bring us closer to Jesus—we can share our happiness with others.”*

That afternoon, Ella and Grace played again. Grace said, *“My mom and I talked about what you said yesterday. We decided to be more careful about the shows we choose to watch, and to pick shows where people are being kind and helpful to*

*one another.” Ella smiled. “That’s awesome!” Grace grinned. “Now we both get to fill our hearts with good things!” They spent the rest of the day playing outside, pretending to be helpers like Jesus—sharing snacks, feeding pretend animals, and making each other laugh in kind ways.*

When the sun began to set, Ella prayed, *“Jesus, thank You for helping me make good choices about how I spent my time today.”* She looked up at the beautiful sunset sky, with its colors of pink and gold, and felt peace fill her heart. *“Whatever is pure, whatever is lovely,”* she whispered, *“that’s what I want to think about.”* Ella smiled, knowing that every day she had a choice—and with Jesus’ help, she could choose what was *pure, lovely, and good.*

“Whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable—if anything is excellent or praiseworthy—think about such things” Philippians 4:8, NIV.

**REFLECTION QUESTIONS FOR KIDS,  
IF SHARED IN A LESSON STUDY FOR SABBATH SCHOOL OR  
ADVENTURER CLUB MEETING.**

- What are some ways you can spend your time that bring you closer to Jesus?
- What kinds of things make your heart feel peaceful and happy inside?
- How can you ask Jesus to help you make good choices each day?

# “WELL, NAH!”

## JO-NAH

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BY MINDY SALYERS

**TEXT:**  
**JONAH 1:1-17**

Joe was a super busy guy. On top of being a student at G.G.A. (God’s Grace Academy), he was a leader on campus. As such, he was often asked to preach for Vespers programs and regularly led out in Sabbath School. In fact, most of the students looked up to Joe, considering him to be a very spiritual person.

That was on the outside.

On the inside, Joe liked being looked up to by others and *loved* being seen as someone who was close to God. It made him feel good inside to be busy doing the Lord’s work. And working for God was demanding. It meant consulting with the Religion teachers and serving as Class Pastor. He was often seen praying with others, speaking at the student-led evangelistic series, and bringing others to Christ.

With all the busyness, it was easy for Joe to lose sight of what was important. He regularly became so consumed with his to-do list that he forgot to *pause* and *listen*. Often, he would get a little nudge in his heart that would say, “Spend time with Me. Come be near Me.” But Joe’s response was always this:

“Welllll, nahhhhh!”

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**Mindy Salyers**, LCMHC-A, MSC, BA, is an Elementary Educator, School Counselor and Certified OLWEUS Trainer in the USA.

“Wouldn’t pausing and taking time alone with God actually take away from doing God’s work?” questioned Joe to himself.

So, Joe continued with his busy schedule.

On top of his spiritual leadership demands, life kept Joe busy in other ways.

During Fall Break, Joe grabbed an opportunity to leave the big city and went on a Mediterranean cruise getaway. As he was lugging his giant duffle bag to board the ship headed west, he *again* heard the pause-and-listen nudge from God. But, in typical fashion, Joe responded:

“Welllll, nahhhhh!”

“The whole point of this cruise is to get away and relax!” thought Joe, again avoiding the ‘presence of God’” (Jonah 1:2).

Once aboard, Joe wandered up to the Lido deck to check it out. With bad weather approaching, he watched as deckhands scurried around preparing for an incoming storm. The winds and rainclouds made the seaman frantically busy (Jonah 1:4).

That was on the outside.

On the inside, Joe had gone down to his cruise ship stateroom to take a nap. There in the quiet, he heard the heart-nudge again. “Spend time with Me,” the Voice said. “Come be near Me.”

“Welllll, nahhhhh!” thought Joe.

“I’ve earned some rest and relaxation! I need a get-away break!” So, Joe fell sound asleep (Jonah 1:5).

As Joe napped, he was rudely awakened by an announcement crackling through the intercom. The cruise ship Director spoke into his room, saying “Arise! All passengers must remain awake and stay alert, due to the severity of the storm” (Jonah 1:6). Realizing that there might be real danger, Joe felt the quiet nudge come again. “Spend time with Me. Come be near Me.”

“Wellllll, nahhhhh!” responded Joe.

“Now is not a good time be alone with God. There’s a typhoon coming!”

Joe, now fully awake, hurried up to the Promenade deck. He was bewildered by passengers’ responses to the impending storm. Some were huddled in corners silently praying for safety, scared to be on a ship at sea during severe weather. Others joined the Activities Director for a game of cards (Jonah 1:7). The people nearest Joe realized he was a Jesus-believer and gathered around him, hoping for answers (Jonah 1:9). “What can we do to calm this crazy storm?” they asked, hoping he had some insight (Jonah 1:11).

That was on the outside.

On the inside, Joe felt guilty as he heard the quiet nudge once again. "Spend time with Me. Come be near Me."

"Welllll, nahhhhh!" Joe almost said aloud. "Now is definitely not the time to have a personal Jesus-moment! It's about to get crazy!"

And crazy, it got! As the waves raged, the Captain attempted to turn the *The Silver Queen* cruise ship around and head back to port, but to no avail (Jonah 1:13). Passenger behavior was getting wild, especially up on Sky Deck. Some wore rain gear, while others waited by the lifeboats practicing an emergency muster drill. Joe even saw one guy wearing a snorkel and life ring!

As the storm got worse, the people around Joe got worse, too. Without answers, they began to blame him, angry that he claimed to be a God-believer but wasn't in-tune with God (Jonah 1:10). As the sea raged, their tempers raged.

"Get this guy off the ship," they shouted! Anyone who isn't helping solve the problem, *becomes* the problem" (Jonah 1:11)!

From there, things escalated quickly. Desperate to expedite Joe's disembarkation, the cruise security officers escorted him to the exit. Realizing that he probably *was* the problem, Joe gave in (Jonah 1:12). This wasn't turning out to be the vacation that he had hoped.

You've probably guessed it by now that you're familiar with this story. Joe, or Jo-NAH, as we know him to be, was called to be a spiritual leader to the Biblical city of Nineveh. Called to preach a message of God's repentance and grace, Jonah kept busy with the demanding schedule life handed him. However, time after time he avoided listening to God-nudges for him to spend Jesus-time alone. Instead, Jonah ran away from God, avoiding the quiet voice that said, "Spend time with Me. Come be near Me."

So now we're here in our Bible story, and Jonah has been thrown off the cruise ship into the ocean! Poor Joe! He wasn't even wearing his bathing suit, and now he's swimming for his life! Joe could feel himself sinking, swallowing, and sputtering. "This is it," thought Joe. "I'm done for!"

And he really was finished. The storm pummeled him so fiercely that he quickly lost any ability to swim. Down, down, down he sank, accepting his fate. The cold water was icy and the current strong. Wind whipped as he clawed for the surface.

That was on the outside.

Suddenly, Joe was on the inside, because "the Lord had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah" (Jonah 1:17). There was no more resisting and fighting. Joe knew it now. Time after time Jonah had ignored God's soft invitation for him to "Spend time with Me. Come be near Me." Here he sat, now, in the dark, dank,

disgusting belly of a *dag* (Hebrew word for fish). Once again, the nudge came to him: "Spend time with Me. Come be near Me."

But this time, Joe's response was different. Instead of his regular "Welllll, nahhhhh," Joe resoundingly responded "Whale, yeahhhhhh!" It took the belly of a fish and three days of time alone with God for Joe to get his heart right.

And, you? You're a busy leader in your own rite – at your school, on your athletic teams, with your siblings, and other extracurriculars. On top of that, there's always demands with friends wanting to text, game, and video chat. It's easy to get so consumed with what you're doing that you lose sight of what's important: Spending time with God.

So, when you hear that quiet voice of God inviting you to spend time alone with Him, do it! Create a special place for you to *pause* and *listen*. It may be your porch swing, or bedroom, or a whale tent. Whatever your special place, just make sure it allows you to have quiet time with Jesus. Then, when you get the nudge, you can confidently respond, "Whale, yeahhhhhh!"

# THE MIRROR JUST FOR YOU!

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BY MILDRED WEISS

**THE TEXTS:**  
**EXODUS 20:3-17; GENESIS 4:2-8**

**PROP:**  
Mirror

What do we use mirrors for? (Bring out a mirror for the kids to see and wait for answers) Yes, that's right! We use them to look at ourselves, fix our hair, clean our faces, shave, and more.

Well, God gave us an incredible mirror to look at and "fix" ourselves with. The 10 Commandments are like a mirror that shows us what God is like! We can call them "happy rules"! When we follow these rules, we shine and reflect God's love to everyone around us. But when we make wrong choices (that's called sin), it's like getting smudges on a mirror - we don't shine as brightly. (If possible, smudge the mirror with cream or oil so that the image doesn't look as bright, and we can't see ourselves well.)

God gave us these commandments because He loves us and wants us to be truly happy! They're not meant to make life boring - they're meant to help us live the BEST life possible!

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**Mildred Weiss**, PGDipEd, B.S. in Nutrition, is a Freelance Project Manager from Lacombe, Alberta, Canada.

I want to tell you about one specific happy rule that nowadays is very hard to follow. (If you have a visual of the Ten Commandments, show them and highlight the last commandment). One of God's commandments tells us, "*Don't covet.*" That means not wishing you had what someone else has. This rule helps us stop comparing ourselves to others. Instead of looking at what our neighbors have, God wants us to look at HIM and trust His promises. When we compare ourselves to others, we forget how much God loves us and all the good things He has planned for us!

Social media is not helping us look at what God has prepared for us and what He wants us to be. Instead, it shows us all the things our friends and family, even strangers, have and are doing! It is hard for us not to compare ourselves with them and with what we see. Social media can make us compare ourselves with others, ALL THE TIME. But God's plan is different! When we stay rooted in God's Word (*like a strong tree with deep roots*), we can be a good influence and help others look at Jesus instead of comparing ourselves to our neighbors.

There is a Bible story that shows exactly what comparison does to us. Can you guess which one? (Wait for answers) YES! The Cain and Abel story! Can you imagine what Cain and Abel would be like if they had social media? Abel might post: "*Just gave my BEST lamb to God! So thankful! #Blessed #Worship*" (If possible, create a graphic mimicking a social media post).

Cain sees Abel's post getting lots of likes and thinks, "*Why does God like Abel's offering better than mine? I brought vegetables! I worked hard to grow them. That should be good enough!*" Instead of being happy for his brother and following God's instructions, Cain got angry. He kept comparing himself to Abel - looking at his brother instead of looking at God. His angry feelings grew and grew until he did something terrible - he hurt his brother Abel.

This shows us what happens when we compare! Comparing ourselves to others can make us jealous, angry, and sad. It pulls our eyes away from God's love, and His good plans for us. That is why God gave us happy rules! Follow them, stick to them, and we will be happy, and shining for Jesus. (*While cleaning the mirror, tell the kids -*) We don't need to worry about what others have because God has special blessings just for us! If we ask Jesus to help us, ask Him to forgive our mistakes and bad choices, the mirror will be clean, and we can reflect Jesus' love to others.

# MANDY, THE GOOD INFLUENCER

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BY ORATHAI CHURESON

## THE TEXTS: PHILIPPIANS 4:8, AND MATTHEW 6:33

In a cozy town lived Mandy, a cheerful teenager. Mandy enjoyed many things: reading books, playing outdoors, and chatting with her friends on her tablet. But more than anything, she dreamed of becoming a **famous social media influencer**. She loved sharing her drawings, songs, jokes, and stories online, and her favorite thing was receiving lots of hearts, likes, and positive comments from her followers.

One Sabbath morning at church, her Sabbath School teacher, Mrs. Mercy, led a discussion about being a light in the world. She opened her Bible and read to the class, “You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden” (Matthew 5:14).

She looked up and smiled warmly at the class. “This means God wants us to shine for Him. We’re called to be good influencers—through kindness, respect, compassion, and goodness. When people see how we live, whether in person or online, they should feel encouraged. Even on digital platforms, in games, or on social media, we can shine God’s light by what we post and how we treat others.”

Mandy listened closely. Her heart felt a little heavy. Lately, she had been wondering: Am I really a good influencer online? She always thought she was. She shared happy moments, fun art, and sweet stories. But something inside her began to question her motives.

She remembered how good it felt to receive lots of likes and praise. But she also remembered how upset she got when someone criticized her. If someone

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**Orathai Chureson**, PhD, is the director of the Department of Children’s Ministries at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists World Headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, USA.

commented, “Your drawing is silly,” or “Nobody likes your singing,” she’d feel crushed. Without thinking, she often responded harshly: “It’s none of your business!” or “You don’t deserve to see my art!”

At the time, Mandy thought she was defending herself. But after replying that way, she just felt worse. The joy of sharing her creativity began to fade. The fun became empty. Even her favorite posts no longer made her smile. She began to dislike what she once loved. Deep down, she knew this wasn’t how a good influencer should act.

That evening, Mandy sat on her bed and opened the Bible her dad had given her. She came across this verse: “Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one” (Colossians 4:6).

She didn’t understand what it meant right away, so she asked her dad. He explained, “Being full of grace means speaking kindly, especially when others don’t. ‘Seasoned with salt’ means being wise with your words, not bitter or harsh. Your words can heal or hurt—online and offline.”

He added, “God wants you to use your voice to build others up. You don’t have to be a famous influencer, but a good and faithful one. Put God first in everything you do, and He’ll bless you.”

Then he showed her this beautiful promise from Jesus: “But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you” (Matthew 6:33).

Mandy’s heart felt lighter. She didn’t have to chase popularity. She just had to focus on being kind and representing God well—even online.

The next day, Mandy decided to post a new video, but this time with a different mindset. She sang a song about kindness and love, and at the end of the video, she said, “Let’s choose to be kind to one another, just like Jesus teaches us.”

When the comments came in, some were still unkind: “I don’t like your song.” “You’re not good at singing.” But this time, Mandy replied with gentleness: “Thank you for your feedback. I hope you find a song that brings you joy!”

To her surprise, a few kids started writing kind responses: “Your song made me smile!” “Thanks for spreading love!” Mandy smiled. She realized her words could brighten someone’s day and help others choose kindness as well.

Later that week, at recess, Mandy noticed her friend Liam sitting alone. He looked upset. When she asked what was wrong, he said some kids had been teasing him online because he wore glasses.

Mandy’s heart ached. She knew exactly how he felt. Instead of getting angry, she remembered a Bible verse her dad had once shared:

“Let no corrupt word proceed out of your mouth, but what is good for necessary edification, that it may impart grace to the hearers” (Ephesians 4:29).

That evening, Mandy created a special post for Liam. She wrote: “Everyone is special and made by God just the way they are. Glasses help Liam see the world clearly—and that’s awesome!” She tagged him in the post.

Soon, comments poured in: “Liam, you’re awesome!” “Glasses are cool!” Liam was surprised and smiled wider than ever. Mandy saw the power of using her platform for good.

Later that month, their school hosted a “Good Digital Influencer Week,” and Mandy was invited to speak. She shared her story and the lessons she learned about being a light online.

She read aloud: “A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger” (Proverbs 15:1).

She said, “Some influencers are famous, but not all of them are good. Many use jokes to hurt others or post things that stir up hate. But a good influencer uplifts people, shares God’s love, and helps others feel safe and valued.”

Mandy reminded them of one of her favorite verses: “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely... meditate on these things” (Philippians 4:8).

“Let’s be influencers who post what is good, noble, and kind. That’s how we shine God’s light in a dark world,” she said.

After the assembly, many students thanked her. Even those who had been unkind before promised to try harder. Mandy became known as a good influencer—not because she was popular, but because her actions reflected God’s love.

That night, Mandy wrote in her journal: “Being a good influencer is better than being a famous one. When I put God first and treat others kindly—even online—I’m shining His light. And that’s what matters most.”

## **MANDY’S GOOD DIGITAL INFLUENCER RULES**

- **Be Kind Always:** “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in Christ forgave you” (Ephesians 4:32).
- **Speak the Truth with Love:** “But, speaking the truth in love, may grow up in all things into Him who is the head—Christ” (Ephesians 4:15).
- **Ignore Mean Words, Don’t Return Them:** “Repay no one evil for evil. Have regard for good things in the sight of all men” (Romans 12:17).
- **Help Those Who Are Hurt or Left Out:** “Bear one another’s burdens and so fulfill the law of Christ” (Galatians 6:2).
- **Think Before You Share:** “Whatever things are true... meditate on these things” (Philippians 4:8).

# SEMINARS

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*Seminars* are designed primarily for use during Christian Home and Marriage Week. Please review the full text in advance to become familiarized with the content and key terms. To download a PowerPoint® presentation file visit: [family.adventist.org/2026RB](http://family.adventist.org/2026RB)

- **REDEEMING THE DIGITAL SPACE:  
FAITH, FAMILY, AND TECH-WISE LIVING .....60**  
Guide families to balance digital life with faith through clear boundaries, healthy habits, and mindful choices.
- **RECONNECTING RELATIONSHIPS:  
OVERCOMING THE DISTRACTIONS THAT DISCONNECT US .....69**  
Gain relational tools to ease digital, communication, and caregiving pressures—and restore meaningful connection in the home.
- **A MISSION-FOCUSED PARENTAL LEGACY:  
HOW DISPLAYING GOD’S RELATIONALLY ATTUNED LOVE  
SHAPES OUR CHILDREN’S FAITH & RESILIENCE .....92**  
Help parents model God’s attuned love to build emotionally secure, spiritually grounded, and resilient children.

# REDEEMING THE DIGITAL SPACE: FAITH, FAMILY, AND TECH-WISE LIVING

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BY WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

## THE TEXTS:

**1 CORINTHIANS 10:23, AND JOSHUA 24:15**

## INTRODUCTION

Technology has revolutionized the way we live, work, and connect. While it offers incredible convenience and global reach, it also presents new challenges to family life: the erosion of presence, conversation, and connection. The Apostle Paul’s words ring profoundly true in this context: “All things are lawful for me, but not all things are helpful” (1 Corinthians 10:23, ESV). Just because we can use technology doesn’t mean we always should, or at least not in the ways we currently do.

With the ubiquity of devices, it has become the norm for people to check their email inboxes, which are filled with urgent and not always important notes, draft proposals, and meeting requests, alongside numerous less pressing items. Phone calls, text messages, emails, tweets, and social media postings—from coworkers, clients, bosses, family members, neighbors, and advertisers—arrive unabated throughout the workday, continue during the trip home, and extend into evening hours. Meanwhile, families may sit in the same room, each member engrossed in their own device, unaware of the growing disconnect. Technology, rather than serving as a bridge, has become a barrier in many ways.

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**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.

These scenes are familiar, yet it's worth remembering how recently these modes of communication have become commonplace. Constant multichannel communication with multiple audiences has become a fact of everyday life for many employees and family members. As individuals can constantly initiate and receive communications, and as organizations expect increased reactivity, people's connectivity is intensifying.

This article explores how technology is shaping family life, examines the biblical foundations for presence and connection, and provides practical guidance for families seeking to become tech-wise and faith-filled in the digital age.

## THE DIGITAL DILEMMA IN MODERN FAMILIES

Research clearly demonstrates that technology has become a central force in family life. According to studies, families report spending 4-6 hours a day on screens, both individually and collectively. While technology has enabled easier communication, it has simultaneously led to a decrease in face-to-face communication, an increase in digital conversations, and conflicts centered around screen time.

Key findings from recent research reveal troubling patterns:

- Families frequently use devices during meals, devotions, and even vacations
- Children report feeling unheard or unseen by distracted parents
- Parental modeling plays a crucial role in how children manage their own screen habits
- Studies suggest parents are often distracted by cell phone calls and texts while having dinner with children

Real-life examples mirror these findings. Families may gather in the same physical space yet remain worlds apart, each person absorbed in their digital universe. What was once quality family time has been fragmented by the constant pull of notifications, messages, and the compulsion to check our devices.

The situation is particularly acute because technology is making the boundaries between work and family life increasingly porous. Research shows that temporal, spatial, and relational boundaries—the “mental fences” that separate our different roles and identities—are being fundamentally transformed by communication technologies.

**Temporal boundaries** once provided a clear separation between work hours and family time. However, smartphones and constant connectivity blur these lines, allowing work to intrude on evenings, weekends, and vacations. The traditional 9-to-5 workday has given way to an “always-on” mentality for many professionals.

**Spatial boundaries** that once kept work at the office and family life at home have similarly eroded. Video conferencing tools like Zoom and Skype enable remote work. Still, they also mean that laundry baskets and children's toys may suddenly appear on professional calls, blurring the distinction between workspace and home space.

**The relational boundaries** between professional and personal networks have become increasingly complicated with the advent of social media. Platforms like Facebook and Instagram create “context collapse,” where coworkers, family members, childhood friends, and professional contacts all occupy the same digital space, making it challenging to maintain appropriate boundaries between different aspects of our lives.

## BIBLICAL FOUNDATIONS FOR PRESENCE AND CONNECTION

Scripture offers profound wisdom about the importance of presence, connection, and relational living—principles that stand in stark contrast to the distracted, fragmented existence that technology can foster.

- **Deuteronomy 6:6-9** teaches that faith is passed on through daily interactions: “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.” This vision of faith formation requires sustained presence and attention—commodities increasingly scarce in our hyperconnected world.
- **Genesis 2:18** reminds us, “It is not good for man to be alone,” underscoring God’s design for relational living. We were created for connection, communion, and community. Yet technology, paradoxically, can leave us feeling more isolated even as it promises to connect us with everyone, everywhere.
- **Colossians 3:12-14** calls us to “clothe ourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience”—virtues that require us to be fully present with one another. Compassion demands that we notice the suffering of others. Patience requires us to slow down and truly listen. These biblical virtues are difficult to cultivate when we’re constantly distracted by subsequent notifications.

Technology, when unregulated, disrupts these foundational principles. Presence is replaced by preoccupation. Conversation is reduced to emojis and brief text exchanges. Compassion is compromised by distraction. The rich, face-to-face interactions through which faith is transmitted and relationships are deepened give way to surface-level digital exchanges.

Families who wish to pass on a legacy of faith must make intentional time for togetherness. We must treat the home as sacred ground—a sanctuary for discipleship, meaningful conversation, and love. This requires conscious decisions about how we use technology and deliberate efforts to create space for the kinds of interactions that Scripture describes.

## ASSESSING YOUR FAMILY'S DIGITAL HEALTH

Before meaningful change can occur, honest reflection is needed. A digital health assessment can help families understand their current patterns and make informed adjustments about technology use.

Consider these key questions:

1. How many hours per day are spent on screens—individually and as a family? Track actual usage rather than relying on estimates, as most people significantly underestimate their screen time.
2. Are devices used during meals, bedtime, or family devotionals? These sacred times should be protected from digital intrusion.
3. Do family members feel heard, seen, and valued? Ask each person directly, creating space for honest feedback without defensiveness.
4. Are tech boundaries clearly communicated and respected? Implicit expectations often lead to conflict; explicit agreements work better.
5. How often do you engage in tech-free activities as a family? Regular device-free time strengthens bonds and creates space for creativity and conversation.

Families can score themselves using this framework:

- **0-10 points: Disconnected** – Technology has severely disrupted family connection and presence
- **11-15 points: Digitally Distracted** – Significant improvements needed in managing technology
- **16-20 points: Digitally Balanced** – Good foundation with room for enhancement
- **21-25 points: Tech-Wise & Present** – Exemplary management of technology in service of relationships

This honest self-assessment creates space for dialogue, confession where needed, and renewed commitment to healthier patterns. The goal isn't to demonize technology but to ensure it serves rather than dominates family life.

## GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR DIGITAL DISCIPLESHIP

In response to these challenges, here are four guiding principles rooted in faith and supported by research:

### A. RECLAIM THE TABLE

Meals are sacred spaces for family connection. Throughout Scripture, shared meals hold profound significance—from the Passover feast to the Last Supper to the wedding banquet of the Lamb. Put away phones, turn off the TV, and use mealtime for storytelling, prayer, and genuine conversation.

As Andy Crouch suggests in *The Tech-Wise Family*, reclaiming analog habits strengthens relational bonds. Research confirms that families who eat together regularly without devices report stronger relationships, better communication, and even improved academic performance in children.

Make a family commitment: devices stay in another room during meals. Use this time to ask meaningful questions: What was the best part of your day? What challenged you? How did you see God at work?

### B. CREATE SACRED TECH-FREE ZONES

Establish clear boundaries about where technology is welcome and where it is not in your home. Bedrooms, bathrooms, and the dinner table should be technology-free zones. The presence of devices in bedrooms disrupts sleep, creates temptation for late-night use, and undermines rest.

Consider designating one day each week as a “digital Sabbath”—a complete break from unnecessary technology use. This practice, rooted in the biblical rhythm of Sabbath rest, creates space for worship, family connection, outdoor activities, reading, and face-to-face conversation.

These boundaries reorient hearts toward God and one another. They communicate that people matter more than devices, that presence is more valuable than productivity, and that rest is part of God’s good design for human flourishing.

### C. MODEL HEALTHY TECH USE

Children follow examples more than rules. If parents constantly check their devices, children are likely to do the same. As Jesus taught in Matthew 7:5, transformation begins with self-examination: we must first remove the log from our own eye before addressing the speck in another’s.

Parents must honestly assess their own technology habits:

- Do you check your phone while your child is talking to you?
- Are you distracted during family activities?

- Do you prioritize responding to work emails over engaging with family members?
- What message does your technology use send about what you value?

Modeling healthy boundaries might mean:

- Keeping your phone out of sight during family time
- Establishing personal limits on social media use
- Not bringing devices to the bedroom
- Being fully present during conversations without the distraction of notifications. Children learn what they see. When parents demonstrate that people are more important than pixels, children internalize these values.

#### **D. PRIORITIZE PRESENCE POCKETS**

Schedule 15-20 minutes daily of undistracted, face-to-face time with each family member. Research shows that these small, consistent investments yield significant relational dividends. This might take the form of:

- Morning or bedtime talks with each child individually
- A daily walk around the neighborhood with your spouse
- Family devotions where everyone is fully present
- Reading aloud together without devices nearby

These “presence pockets” communicate value, build trust, strengthen emotional bonds, and create opportunities for spiritual growth and development. They may seem small, but their cumulative impact is profound.

Quality presence requires quantity time. We cannot schedule intimacy or engineer meaningful conversation, but we can create the conditions where these emerge naturally—and that requires protecting time and attention from digital encroachment.

### **DEVELOPING A FAMILY TECH COVENANT**

Just as Joshua declared, “As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord” (Joshua 24:15), families can make intentional commitments about their digital habits. A Family Tech Covenant provides shared vision and mutual accountability.

#### **SAMPLE FAMILY TECH COVENANT COMMITMENTS:**

1. We will prioritize face-to-face time over screen time. When choosing between engaging with devices or engaging with each other, we choose people first.

2. We will keep technology out of sacred spaces, such as mealtime and the Sabbath. Specific times and places are reserved for connection with God and family.
3. We will ask permission before posting about each other. We respect each family member's privacy and won't share photos or information without consent.
4. We will observe a weekly "digital Sabbath." One day each week, we rest from unnecessary technology use to focus on worship, rest, and relationships.
5. We will regularly evaluate and adjust our tech habits. At least once a month, we'll discuss how technology is serving or hindering our family life and make adjustments as needed.
6. We will use technology to build up, not tear down. Our digital communication will be characterized by encouragement, kindness, and truth-telling in love.
7. We will protect bedtime as device-free time. All screens will be put away at least 30 minutes before bed to promote better sleep and rest.

Writing and signing a covenant together creates shared ownership. It's not parents imposing rules on children, but a family agreeing together about the kind of home culture they want to create. Display the covenant prominently and refer to it regularly, revising as children grow and circumstances change.

## PRACTICAL NEXT STEPS

Change doesn't happen all at once. It starts with one step. Here are practical next steps for families:

### 1. CHOOSE ONE HABIT TO CHANGE THIS WEEK

Start small and specific:

- No phones during dinner for seven consecutive days
- Family devotions before anyone checks their morning devices
- A 30-minute evening walk without phones
- Reading a chapter aloud together before bed

Success with one change builds momentum and confidence for additional changes.

### 2. HOLD A FAMILY MEETING TO DISCUSS TECH USE

Create a safe space for confession, forgiveness, and collaborative goal-setting:

- Ask each person how they feel about current technology use in the family

- Identify specific problems or frustrations
- Brainstorm solutions together
- Agree on initial commitments
- Schedule follow-up conversations

Approach this meeting with humility and openness rather than judgment. Everyone—parents included—should be willing to acknowledge areas where technology has harmed family life.

### **3. DOWNLOAD OR CREATE A TECH COVENANT**

Use the sample provided above or create your own. Make it specific to your family's values, challenges, and circumstances. Have every family member sign it, then post it in a visible location. Revisit monthly to assess progress and make adjustments.

### **4. PRAY FOR WISDOM AND UNITY**

Ask God to help your family become tech-wise and Christ-centered:

- Pray for wisdom in making decisions about technology
- Ask for grace when you fall short of your commitments
- Seek God's guidance in teaching children healthy habits
- Request unity as you navigate these changes together

Remember that this is spiritual work, not merely behavior modification. Ultimately, the goal is not just to develop better technology habits, but to cultivate a deeper love for God and neighbor—a love that requires presence, attention, and intentionality.

## **CONCLUSION: TECHNOLOGY AS GIFT OR TEST**

Technology is both a gift and a test. It can serve us or enslave us. It can build bonds or break them. The difference lies in whether we use it with intention and faith, or allow it to use us.

By honestly assessing our digital health, reclaiming sacred rhythms, and anchoring our homes in biblical principles, we can redeem the digital space for God's glory. We can raise children who know how to be fully present, who value face-to-face connection, who can discern when technology serves love and when it hinders it.

The challenge before us is significant. Research suggests that technology management requires what scholars call "digital cultural capital"—the

awareness, motivation, and skill to gain control over technology rather than being controlled by it. This capacity is not equally distributed across society and may actually deepen existing inequalities if those with resources and education teach their children digital wisdom while others do not.

But for families of faith, the motivation to develop digital wisdom comes from something deeper than social advantage. It flows from our calling to love God with all our heart, soul, mind, and strength, and to love our neighbors—including the family members sitting across from us—as ourselves. Technology must serve this great commandment, not undermine it.

Let us remember Paul’s words: “Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Romans 12:2). The pattern of this world increasingly involves constant connectivity, perpetual distraction, and the fragmentation of attention. The transformed life, by contrast, requires presence, depth of engagement, and relationships characterized by genuine love.

As we navigate this digital age, may we do so with wisdom, intentionality, and an unwavering commitment to the things that matter most: loving God, loving our families, and passing on a legacy of faith that technology serves but never supplants. The journey toward becoming a tech-wise family begins with a single step—one conversation, one device-free dinner, one pocket of presence at a time.

The question is not whether technology will be part of our lives—it will. The question is whether we will master it in the service of love, or allow it to master us to the detriment of what matters most. By God’s grace, and with intentional effort, we can choose the former, redeeming the digital space for faithfulness, connection, and flourishing family life.

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# RECONNECTING RELATIONSHIPS: OVERCOMING THE DISTRACTIONS THAT DISCONNECT US

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BY HEATHER BEESON, ELIZABETH JAMES, BRYAN CAFFERKY,  
SHONDEL MISHAW, AND MONIQUE WILLIS

## PURPOSE

The purpose of this workshop is to help couples and families reconnect with one another. This is not intended to replace psychotherapy or marital counseling for couples who are in distress and needing greater support in improving their relationships. Rather, this workshop aims to provide psychoeducation and support couples and families navigating the everyday stressors which can lead to disconnection and distance in relationships.

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**Heather Beeson**, DMFT, MA, LMFT, is an Assistant Professor for the Department of Counseling and Family Sciences, and the Director for the Doctor of Marital and Family Therapy Program for Loma Linda University School of Behavioral Health, Loma Linda, California, USA.

**Elizabeth James**, DMFT, MA, LMFT, LPCC is an Assistant Professor for Counseling and Family Sciences, and the Coordinator for the Marital and Family Therapy MS Online Program for Loma Linda University School of Behavioral Health, Loma Linda, California, USA.

**Bryan Cafferky**, PhD, MDiv, LMFT, CFLE is an Associate Professor in the School of Behavioral Health at Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, California, USA.

**Shondel Mishaw**, DMFT, MEd, LMFT is an Assistant Professor, Counseling and Family Sciences, Loma Linda, California, USA.

**Monique Willis**, PhD, MS, LMFT is an Assistant Professor, Counseling and Family Sciences Director of Clinical Training, Marital and Family Therapy Programs, Loma Linda, California, USA.

This workshop is intended for couples who want to improve the health of their relationship and better navigate common stressors which may contribute to disconnection and distance. The aim of the workshop is to provide psychoeducation and introduce relational skills (which emphasize rituals of connection) for couples to practice with each other and with their family.

The facilitator should have some experience providing relationship education or have worked in a mental health or other service setting. Ideally, referrals to mental health services would be available for couples and families needing greater support and care beyond the scope of a one-day workshop. Although several elements of this workshop borrow from attachment theory and the Gottman Method Couple Therapy (GMCT), introducing these workshop resources is not a substitute for couples receiving quality mental health services.

### **WORKSHOP OUTCOMES:**

- Improved knowledge and awareness of common sources of disconnection that can create distance in relationships.
- Acquisition of tools and skills that can support reconnection in couple and family relationships.
- Understanding the importance of reconnection and commitment to creating a family culture that prioritizes connection.
- Ability to implement strategies discussed in workshop at home as a couple/family to reconnect and create rituals of connection.
- Increased confidence in personal ability to seek connection and respond to connection seeking within the family unit.

### **RESOURCES NEEDED**

- One facilitator per 10-12 couples
- Digital or printed copies of worksheets (in appendix)

### **WORKSHOP OUTLINE**

#### **1. INTRODUCTION (20 MINUTES)**

The facilitator should introduce the topic, themselves, and facilitate introductions amongst participants. This should be a brief opening for the workshop.

- Welcome, prayer, and introduction to the workshop.

- Brief icebreaker activity for couples to get to know one another. Couples share one thing they identify as causing disconnection in relationships and one thing they hope to learn during the workshop.
- If there are more than 10-12 couples in attendance and multiple facilitators are present, groups will need to be created. There should be no more than 12 couples per group.

## 2. RELATIONAL SYSTEMS IN GOTTMAN METHOD COUPLE THERAPY (30 MINUTES)

The following section is a brief overview of Gottman Method Couple Therapy and there is a lengthier discussion in the following sections. The facilitator should be able to describe this approach and apply it to the common causes of relationship disconnection that are introduced in the next portion of the workshop.

- **Friendship System**

Gottman's Sound Relationship House encompasses the friendship system where love maps and shared fondness and admiration are housed (Rajaei et al., 2019). The friendship system is essential for maintaining fun in a relationship and is the foundation of a strong relationship. Love maps, which represent knowledge of characteristics of one's partner, such as likes and dislikes, and shared fondness and admiration, which involves sharing affection, respect, and validation, are key facets of intimacy and closeness in relationships (Brigance et al., 2024).

- **Conflict Management System**

The conflict management system is the way in which a couple communicates and handles disagreements and discontentment. It is bolstered by turning toward bids for connection, maintaining a positive perspective, accepting a partner's influence, opening communication about problems (particularly solving the solvable problems), and practicing self-soothing. These skills are essential to managing conflict in a relationship.

- **Creation of Shared Meaning System**

Creating shared meaning embraces the dreams couples have individually, relationally, and familial. This experience of creating shared meaning together solidifies the shared aspirations and hopes the couple holds for themselves and their families (Brigance, 2024). It is accessible when couples are able to manage their dreams within conflict by using effective conflict management skills.

### 3. COMMON CAUSES OF DISCONNECTION (90 MINUTES)

The facilitator should review the information in the main body of the workshop for in-depth information regarding these four sources of disconnection. The facilitator will discuss these four areas of disconnection and explain how these common sources of disconnection occur in relationships. As relevant, the facilitator will use tools and concepts from Gottman Method Couple Therapy to give examples of how these sources of disconnection occur and harm relationships, while providing information regarding how couples can overcome these sources of disconnection.

- ***Dysfunctional Communication*** - ineffective or negative communication patterns (such as criticism or avoidance) can create emotional distance which can lead to unresolved conflict in relationships.
- ***Attachment Styles*** - insecure attachment styles often contribute to misaligned needs and expectations, leading to emotional disconnection between partners.
- ***Digital Disconnection*** - “technoference” can negatively affect relationship satisfaction, leads to emotional disengagement, and is linked to poorer connection in romantic relationships.
- ***Caregiver Stress*** - when one or both partners experience caregiver stress, emotional availability and relational support may decline, straining their connection.

### 4. METHODS OF RECONNECTION AND REVIEW OF WORKSHEETS (10 MINUTES FOR COUPLES TO REVIEW WORKSHEETS AND TAKE A BRIEF BREAK)

The following worksheets are included in the appendix and can be distributed to couples following a discussion of the tools and sources of disconnection. Couples should be given a brief break before practicing the love maps activity that follows.

- Love Maps
- Emotional Bids and the 5:1 Ratio
- Appreciation
- Fondness and Admiration
- Creation of Shared Meaning

### 5. LOVE MAPS DISCUSSION AND PRACTICE (20 MINUTES)

The facilitator will welcome couples back from their break and invite them to sit with each other and engage in the following activity. This is a sample activity that couples can use to practice reconnecting and communicating openly. This can be viewed as an “antidote” to the sources of disconnection discussed earlier, or other unique sources of disconnection that couples may

have identified in the ice breaker. The facilitator should encourage couples to consider how they can use these questions to also understand how their unique sources of disconnection may be impacting them.

- Couples will be given the Love Maps worksheet which provides prompts for asking questions to get to know one another. Often, couples fall into a lull of believing they know their partner well enough and do not need to seek new knowledge or reconfirm previous knowledge (e.g., “is your favorite outdoor activity still going for a walk? Or is there something you have started to enjoy more?”).
- Couples will sit together and ask each other questions on the worksheet, or ask their own questions, and write down any new information they learned about their partner.
- The facilitator should walk around and ensure that couples are engaging in this activity from a place of curiosity and connection, not a space to get into conflict. Right now, the goal is strengthening love maps, because this is the foundation of a strong relationship.

## **6. WRAP UP (10 MINUTES)**

The facilitator should let couples know that the workshop is coming to a close and invite them back to a larger group discussion. The facilitator should plan to answer any questions or provide referrals to other services as needed following the workshop.

- The facilitator should thank couples for attending and congratulate them for taking an active role in the health of their relationship.
- The facilitator should hand out referrals for therapeutic services as needed.
- The facilitator should be the last one to leave, answering any questions and offering support as needed.

## **SEMINAR INTRODUCTION**

### **MAIN POINT**

Couples are faced with a myriad of stressors which can create distance and disconnection in relationships. This workshop aims to remedy this disconnection by providing practical tools and resources to improve relational connection.

## **GOTTMAN METHOD COUPLE THERAPY**

Gottman Method Couple Therapy (GMCT) is a researched based approach to addressing couple relationships. After decades of work with couples,

Drs. John and Julie Gottman began developing a theory for improving couples' relationships. The theory examines three couple systems: (1) the friendship system, (2) the conflict management system, and (3) the creation of shared meaning system (Gottman & Gottman, 2017). John Gottman cites General Systems Theory as the underlying theoretical orientation of Gottman Method Couple Therapy (Gottman & Gottman 2014). Strong relationships are created by strengthening the friendship, conflict, and creating of shared meaning systems. A part of this work is the process of discovering the way in which familial history and the couple's current homeostasis maintains both resilience and conflict. By understanding couple history and couple norms, practitioners can support couples in discovering new methods of connection to reduce relational conflict.

Strong friendships are created through building love maps (basic understanding of partner's world), increasing fondness and admiration for one another, creating a culture of appreciation in the relationship, consistently emotionally turning towards one another, and increasing positivity (Gottman & Gottman 2017). Conflict management entails decreasing negative sentiment override, and reducing the presence of criticism, defensiveness, contempt, and stonewalling (known as the Four Horsemen), using soft start-ups, accepting influence, repairing and de-escalating conflict, and compromise. When conflict surrounds unsolvable problems, clients are encouraged to have a dialogue maintaining the 5:1 positive to negative interaction ratio. To maintain this ratio, couples seek to approach one another with kindness and respect more often than they approach with criticism or frustration. Lastly, couples are able to co-create meaning and dreams for their future through mutually fulfilling hopes and aspirations. By embracing a teamwork mindset, couples work with one another to co-create rituals of connection (Gottman & Gottman 2014).

GMCT ideas are frequently offered in couples' workshops and are effective in reducing distress, with the greatest benefits observed when the friendship system and conflict management system are included in the skill building process (e.g. Babcock, Gottman, Ryan, & Gottman, 2013). Relationship education programs and workshops are most successful when the couple attends together, are able to access therapy if needed, are currently safe (e.g., no intimate partner violence), and are able to continually practice the skills taught (Stanley et al., 2019). The current workshop aims to integrate the research and science of GMCT with a user-friendly, skill-oriented approach, to teaching couples practical skills to rebuild connections in their relationships.

## **COMMON CAUSES OF DISCONNECTION**

Couples face many stressors and are often pulled in many directions - experiencing disconnection through various pathways, including dysfunctional communication

patterns, mismatched attachment styles, digital distractions, and the emotional toll of caregiver stress. These sources of disconnection are not exhaustive, nor are they the only sources of disconnection. The following sections explore how these factors contribute to relational strain by offering strategies and skills to support reconnection and resilience.

## DYSFUNCTIONAL COMMUNICATION

A relationship between two partners is based upon interaction patterns. These interaction patterns can include communication sequences, and these sequences can include intimacy and support. Other sequences can include conflict and distress (Sullaway & Christensen, 1983). According to Gottman & Silver (2022), there are multiple ways in which couples communicate in both healthy (functional) and unhealthy (dysfunctional) sequences. Dysfunctional communication sequences have been found to be highly associated with marital distress (Broderick, 1981; Gordon, et al., 2007). Most couples often do not realize that their communication sequences are hurtful or harmful toward their spouse or partner, and “communication” is the most common relational “problem” identified by couples. Figure 1 identifies *The Four Horsemen* (The Gottman Institute, n.d.) - communication patterns that are dysfunctional alongside their respective antidotes for more functional communication patterns.

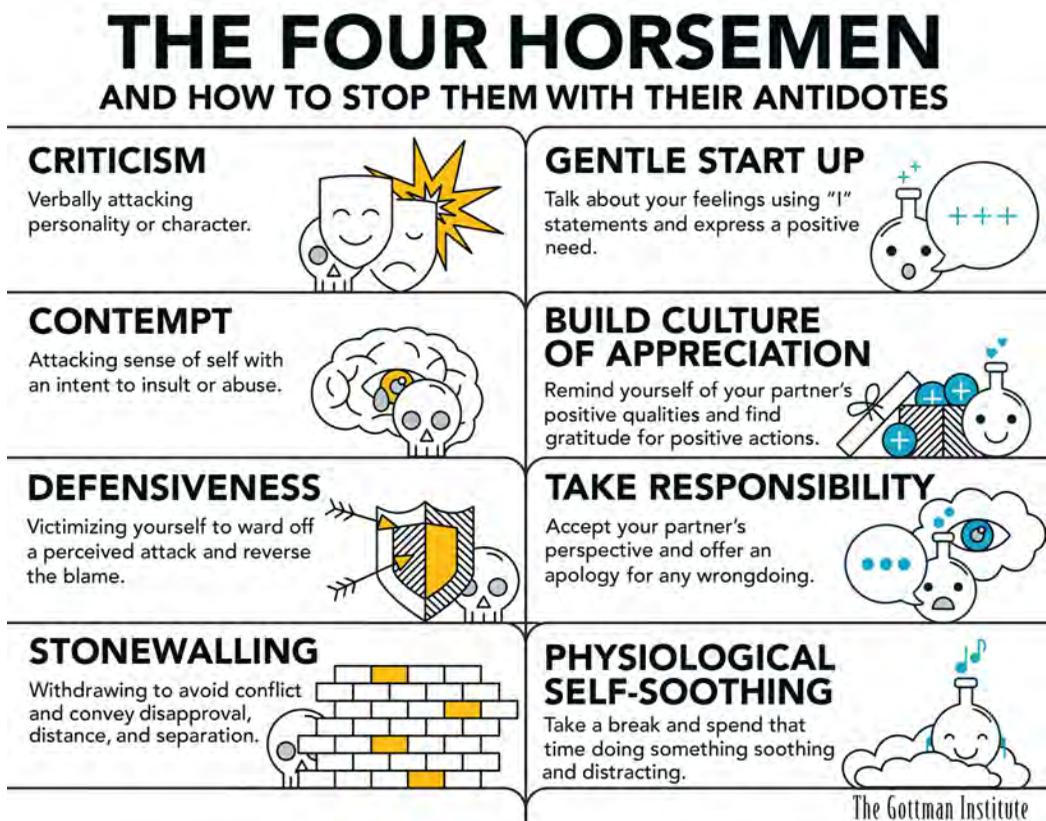


Figure 1. The Four Horsemen

With the above details in mind, consider the additional descriptors in Table 1 which indicates how *The Four Horsemen* can appear when individuals are engaged in dialogue with their partner or spouse.

Horsemen	Example of Dysfunctional Communication	Felt As...	Seen As...	Example of Antidote or Functional Communication
Criticism	<i>“You always talk about yourself. Why is everything always about you?”</i>	Blamed	“You” language	<i>“I’m feeling left out of our talk tonight and I need to vent. Can we please talk about my day at work?”</i>
Defensive	<i>“It’s not my fault that we’re going to be late. It’s your fault since you always get ready at the last second.”</i>	Negative	Offensive/ Defensive responses	<i>“I don’t like being late, but you’re right. We don’t always have to leave so early. I can be a little more flexible.”</i>
Contempt	<i>You forgot to do the dishes again? Ugh. You are so incredibly useless.” (Rolls eyes.)</i>	Disrespected	Emotional disconnect	<i>“I understand that you’ve been busy lately, but could you please remember to do the dishes when I work late? I’d appreciate it.”</i>
Stonewalling	<i>“Look, we’ve been through this over and over again. I’m tired of always needing to remind you about—”</i>	Rejected/ Unheard	Isolation/ Frustration	<i>“Honey, I’m sorry to interrupt you, but I’m feeling overwhelmed, and I need to take a break. Can you give me about twenty minutes and then we can talk?”</i>

**Table 1.** The Four Horsemen Communication Sequences

When working with couples, practitioners typically encounter *dysfunctional communication* as the most frequent and damaging problem - the aim is to ensure healthy or functional communication patterns (Geiss & O’Leary, 1981). Research shows that functional communication patterns help partners/spouses steer away from misunderstandings, dominating, and avoidance. These dysfunctional dynamics may lead to a partner or spouse *not feeling heard* which is highly associated with a demand-withdraw relational pattern and partner or spousal depression (Tannen, 2007; Hoffman & Hay, 2018; Papp, et al., 2011). In thinking further about how couples can work toward *effective communication*, it is important to recognize that it is based on the principle of openness and sincerity toward the partner or spouse (Apostu, 2021).

### **DYSFUNCTIONAL COMMUNICATION REMEDIES:**

A few tools for couples to consider as couples work to repair *openness and sincerity* that may improve communication include:

- ***Listening*** – sharing a fondness or admiration for one another by expressing what they appreciate and love about their partner
- ***Conflict management and resolution*** – understanding that conflict is natural and has positive aspects when addressed and resolved collaboratively
- ***Clear expression*** – attending to non-verbal language such as facial expression, eye contact, posture, etc.
- ***Share love maps*** – sharing individual needs, wants, and feelings and by using “I” statements
- ***Empathetic responses*** – turning towards each other to make an effort of reaching out to their partner and accept their bids for emotional connection
- ***Therapy services*** – addressing communication sequences, styles, and patterns within a therapeutic/clinical space
- ***Quality time*** – time that you spend with someone, giving them your full attention because you value the relationship (Cambridge University Press & Assessment, 2025).

Quality time is pivotal to positive family relationships as it serves to improve communication, enhance reconnection, and facilitate bonding. Dahlberg and Fangstrom (2024) found that positive emotions were associated with children spending time together with parents and other family members. Their study found that children shared feelings of happiness due to the opportunity for positive moments with siblings and/or parents. Quality time is impactful when it is intentional and meaningful. Activities such as family meals, games or movie night, volunteering together, day trips (such as visiting a museum, beach

or local park), can help to strengthen deeper connections. Another essential recommendation is to have “screen free” or “tech free” time. Spending this time for an agreed amount of time, such as mealtime or an hour after mealtime, will allow for opportunities for positive moments which can result in increased happiness, satisfaction, and in improved family connections (Dahlberg & Fangstrom, 2024).

Quality Time Activities / Examples / Ideas	
<b>‘Unplugged’ time</b>	Set time without phones or electronics to focus on one another.
<b>Giving back as a family</b>	Set time to engage in services such as volunteering at a food bank, church, homeless center, or participating in a food drive or community cleanup.
<b>Staycation</b>	Visit a local beach, park, and museum. Plan a picnic and outdoor games.
<b>Family ritual</b>	Set a recurring daily or weekly activity, such as Sunday mealtime or family game night.

## ATTACHMENT STYLES

Attachment Theory, developed by John Bowlby (1969) and expanded by Mary Ainsworth (1978), underscores the importance of secure emotional bonds, not only between caregivers and children but also in adult relationships. **Secure** attachments form when primary caregivers are consistently responsive, attentive, and emotionally attuned – this, in turn, provides the foundation for a future that typically demonstrates *emotional regulation, social competence, and psychological well-being* (Bowlby, 1969; Bretherton, 1992). **Anxious** attachments form when interactions or experiences with a primary caregiver are inconsistent, unpredictable, or dismissive (Main & Solomon, 1990; Mikulincer & Shaver, 2007; Bartholomew & Horowitz, 1991). Individuals with a history of anxious attachment patterns typically have a *fear of abandonment* (Bowlby, 1969; Simpson & Rholes, 2017). **Avoidant** attachments form when a primary caregiver is emotionally rejecting or unavailable (Ainsworth, 1979; Main & Cassidy (1988);

Feeney & Noller, 1990). Individuals with a history of avoidant attachment patterns typically *distance themselves emotionally* (Bowlby, 1969; Simpson & Rholes, 2017). Lastly, **disorganized** attachments form when interactions or experiences with a primary caregiver are inconsistent or frightening leading to a sense of confusion and/or distress (Main & Solomon, 1990; Solomon & George, 1999; Carlson, 1998). Individuals with a history of disorganized attachment patterns are typically *fearful, express excessive anger, and withdraw* from distressing social experiences (Bowlby, 1969; Simpson & Rholes, 2017).

Research by Hazan and Shaver (1987) applied this theory to romantic relationships, finding that secure attachment is linked to *higher relationship satisfaction, better communication, and emotional support*. In contrast, insecure attachment styles (anxious or avoidant) often lead to difficulties in trust and conflict resolution (Fraley & Shaver, 2000). Studies also show that early caregiving experiences influence adult attachment, with individuals who had nurturing care as children more likely to form secure bonds in relationships (Collins & Read, 1990). Secure attachment in couples is associated with greater stability and satisfaction, as partners are better equipped to manage stress and provide support (Simpson et al., 2007; Simpson & Rholes, 2017).

### **TOOLS FOR ADDRESSING ATTACHMENT INJURIES:**

Building, and sometimes repairing, communication sequences or patterns can be done in a few different ways:

- **Awareness** - couples can seek to reconnect in their relationship by recognizing their individual attachment patterns and style while aiming to establish a more secure attachment pattern or style with their partner.
- **Therapeutic Services** - individual and couples' therapy services may further support partners in recognizing and addressing attachment wounds that impact their communication and relational patterns or styles. Therapy services can also serve to provide a space where partners can identify and define their emotions while learning to manage their emotional responses toward one another during their sequences of communication and interaction.
- **Consistency** – couples can seek to respond consistently and thoughtfully to one another as this allows partners to know what to expect from one another and facilitates a stronger and safer attachment.

### **DIGITAL DISCONNECTION**

Research over the past quarter century shows an exponential global increase in the daily use of the internet, smartphones, and social media platforms. In 2000, there were approximately 400 million internet users (6% of the global population;

Internet Society, 2020; International Telecommunication Union, 2000), but social media had not gained substantial traction yet, because Facebook and Twitter were not launched until 2004 and 2006 (respectively). As of 2025, global internet usage has skyrocketed to ~5.6 billion people (approximately 71% of the world’s population)—over a 1000% increase since 2000. More than 5.24 billion people engage in social media (63.9% of the global population; We Are Social, 2025), with the average daily time spent on social media sitting at 2 hours and 21 minutes (Chaffey, 2025). Reports from a global 2023 study found that people check their phones around 58 times per day, which equates to every 12 minutes during their waking hours (Deloitte, 2023). This rise in digital engagement has fundamentally reshaped how people connect in romantic relationships and to the world around them, evidenced by spending increasingly more time on their personal devices for communication, entertainment, and information (Pew Research Center, 2021; Vallor, 2020).

This surge in digital device usage significantly impacts interpersonal relationships, particularly within couples and families. Increased smartphone use is linked to “phubbing” (ignoring someone in favor of engaging with a smartphone) and decreased face-to-face interactions which contribute to feelings of isolation (Al-Saggaf & O’Donnell, 2019). This “technoference” (disruptions caused by digital devices during family time) can be particularly pronounced for couples during the evening, a time which otherwise might be reserved for connection. Research findings show that technoference can negatively affect couple engagement and relationship satisfaction (Kuss & Griffiths, 2017; McDaniel & Coyne, 2016), is linked to poorer communication quality and less meaningful exchanges between partners (McDaniel & Coyne, 2016)—as individuals often become absorbed into their devices rather than engaging each other (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2017). Even placing phones on the table during mealtime can “disrupt human bonding and intimacy” (Przybylski & Weinstein, 2017, p. 245), because the persistent temptation to check messages or notifications can override our ability to be fully present and actively listen. Thus, using phones (or merely the presence of phones) can lead to emotional disengagement, where people retreat into their digital worlds, leaving less room for meaningful interaction.

### REDUCING TECHNOFERENCE

- ***Tech-Free Times*** – have dedicated time away from phones and other technology. This should be a time for family members to bond with one another without the interference of technology.
- ***Wise Tech Usage*** – use technology in a thoughtful way such as taking photos together as a family, encouraging all family members to practice taking pictures and describing what they view as meaningful in the photos.

- **Consume Media Thoughtfully** – select media such as television shows and movies that can promote discussion and bonding. Consider setting aside specific time to discuss the show or film.
- **Identify Tech Challenges** – develop a method for stating when technology is interfering with connection using “I messages”, clear communication, and positive interactions.

## CAREGIVER STRESS

Providing care for a loved one is a common practice among couples and families, with commitments that vary depending on the nature, duration, and level of need. In some instances, care in families extends beyond the general care that may be evident, for example, when parenting a child or nursing a partner during an acute illness. Family caregiving may also involve overseeing a family member or loved one who is affected by a chronic medical or mental health illness or disability, in which they are unable to tend to themselves independently. In other circumstances, couples may serve as foster caregivers. While the impact of caregiving for another beyond the normative experiences may vary, caregiving in these circumstances poses unique challenges that can strain the couple’s or family’s relationship and result in relational disconnect, where caregivers offer substantial emotional and physical support to those in their care.

Research suggests that caregivers who care for others, outside of the normative family experience, may encounter financial, physical, and emotional stressors that may consequently impact partner communication patterns, emotional intimacy, and overall relational satisfaction (Perri et al., 2025; Zehra et al., 2024). In particular, a qualitative study focusing on the couple’s caregiving experiences suggests that caregiving can shift the priorities of the caregiver, resulting in deprioritizing the couple’s relationship (Cannon & Barry, 2023). Similarly, caregiving research focusing on foster care suggests that there are distinct stressors, which include additional time commitments, navigating the welfare system, and frequent transitions and loss associated with the child leaving the home (Arroyo et al., 2024). Cultural expectations and gendered norms that may shape caregiving roles may further impact how the couple experiences stress and resiliencies in their relationship. These influences ultimately may affect how partners navigate their caregiving responsibilities. Couples who share a sense of coherence and psychological capital can help minimize caregiver stress and enhance their relationship.

The impact of caregiving is complex, and it is essential to recognize that caregiving across various types can have positive effects and can improve couples coping (Cannon & Barry, 2023). During times of stress, couples may come together with

a shared vision that can serve to strengthen their relationship. A study examining caregiver stress among families raising a child with autism spectrum disorder found that coherence and psychological capital are essential to improve psychological resources and reduce the stress of caregiving (Zoromba et al., 2024). Couples, therefore, who are experiencing relational challenges can take steps to improve their dynamic and familial coherence. Relationship maintenance is an essential strategy that includes positive daily exchanges, which are influential for building couples' resilience. Namely, these exchanges reflect partners' investment in the other's well-being. Couples' maintenance, where couples engage in practices where they know, care for, and engage with their partner, has also been found to be important, for example, in Foster Caregiving (Arroyo et al., 2023). Across caregiving experiences, couples who experience caregiver stress or conflict can engage in strategies that can improve their functioning. Here are a few tips for daily behaviors to strengthen the couple dynamics for those who may experience caregiving challenges that address the shared couples' experiences and foster connection (Gottman & Gottman, 2017):

#### **MANAGING CAREGIVER STRESS:**

- **Engage Supports** – there may be communities of support available, reach out and ask for help. Couples and families may have friends, family, or professionals who can offer some support in caregiving.
- **Take a Break** – know when to step back and take a break. Caregiving can lead to burnout and emotional fatigue. Knowing when to take a few minutes to take a breath can be vital.
- **Ask for Help** – communicate needs to those who listen so that others know how to offer support.
- **Care for Each Other** – families and couples who are caregiving together need to care for one another. Caring for each other can lighten the caregiving load. When a family member feels cared for, they may feel more able to extend care to another family member.
- **Seek Connection** - stay up to date in each other's lives, be curious about each other's worlds, needs, and desires.
- **Prioritize Quality Time** - Spending quality time together by engaging in regular time spent together or regularly dating.
- **Remain Affectionate** - showing affection and regularly expressing feelings of positivity and appreciation for the other partner.
- **Use Relational Tools** - use positive communication and managing conflict tools, where couples listen actively and engage in practices that soften conversations during conflict.

## CONCLUSION

There are many stressors and distractions that can disconnect us from one another. By increasing our awareness of these distractions, we are able to better mitigate the impact of such stressors. The tools and exercises in this workshop can be one step toward increasing connection, improving communication, and limiting the impact of common stressors. Couples and families should continue to build tools to ensure they remain thoughtful of one another. In a busy world with so many responsibilities it is easy to lose sight of what matters most, our families, our loved ones, and our communities.

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## WORKSHEETS LIST:

The worksheets on the following pages should be given as handouts. The worksheets include:

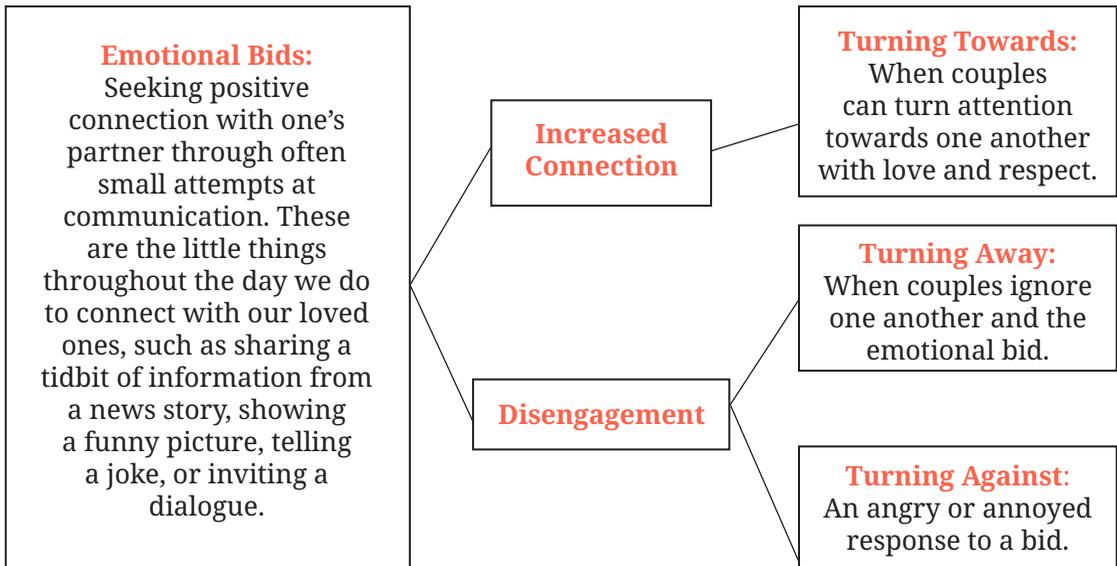
- Love Maps (This is to be used in the Love Mapping Exercise)
- Emotional Bids and the 5:1 Ratio
- Appreciation Words
- Fondness and Admiration
- Creation of Shared Meaning

## LOVE MAPPING

The following worksheet gives prompts for you to use with your partner to spark new insights into who your partner is now, today, in this moment. We all change and grow, this worksheet is intended to help you maintain connection through new conversations. Pick a few questions to ask your partner and see if you learn anything new! You can also create your own questions.

What's the best compliment I could give you?	What is your favorite thing about our family?	What has been helping you relax the most at the end of the day?	What has been the most stressful part of your week recently?
Who do you enjoy talking to the most in your social circle?	What's the most recent fun fact you learned?	Are there any places you've learned of recently that you want to visit?	What would be your ideal Tuesday night?
What's one thing you think I don't know about you?	What's the last thing you newly discovered you like or enjoy?	What has been your favorite meal recently?	What is your fondest memory?
What are you thinking about before you go to bed at night?	What was the last thing you learned that really surprised you?	What's the best part of your day?	What is a hobby you'd be interested in exploring?
What is a new skill you have been wanting to learn?	When do you feel the happiest?	What is an activity from your childhood that you would like to try again?	Who was the last new person you met?
What was the last thing that really excited you?	What is your favorite part of the morning?	What would your ideal weekend look like?	What is your favorite time of day and why?
Who do you currently find inspiring?	What upcoming events are you looking forward to?	Who are you most excited to visit with in the next few weeks?	What was the most out of the ordinary thing you saw recently?
When were you last really nervous?	What is one thing you'd like me to ask you?	What's the most beautiful thing you have seen recently?	What's one thing you'd like to celebrate?

## EMOTIONAL BIDS AND THE 5:1 RATIO



### Examples of Emotional Bids and Turning Towards Responses

**Listening to what your partner says and chitchat:**

P1: *Look at the clouds! That one looks like a dog!*  
P2: *Show me where!*

**Offering assistance when asked:**

P1: *Can you give me a hand with this?*  
P2: *You got it! How can I help?*

**Fulfilling day to day requests:**

P1: *Can you take out the trash?*  
P2: *Sure thing!*

**Collaborate with one another:**

P1: *How would you handle this problem with my coworker?*  
P2: *I might try to...*

**Take your partner's side:**  
P1: *Pat is driving me crazy!*  
P2: *Sounds like Pat needs to give you a break!*

**Be self-care oriented with one another:**  
P1: *Today has been the longest day of my life!*  
P2: *Sounds like we need to hop in a bubble bath, I'll grab the candles!*

**Play and have fun together, be adventurous:**  
P1: *I have been feeling so cooped up today*  
P2: *Let's go for a walk and bring a picnic*

**Share affection:**  
P1: *Will you snuggle with me while I drink my tea?*  
P2: *I'll bring a cozy blanket*

**Learn together:**  
P1: *I want to learn how to bake a soufflé*  
P2: *Let's research recipes, I've never tried that before*

**Answer questions:**  
P1: *What time is it?*  
P2: *Two o'clock*

**Share excitement, even over small accomplishments:**  
P1: *I finally finished responding to all my emails*  
P2: *Nicely done!*

**Share little things about yourself and your day:**  
P1: *What's new with you?*  
P2: *I've started reading a new book*

**Legend:**  
P1: Person 1  
P2: Person 2

## APPRECIATION WORDS

- |                 |                   |                 |
|-----------------|-------------------|-----------------|
| 1. Loving       | 24. Thrifty       | 47. Complex     |
| 2. Thoughtful   | 25. Committed     | 48. Reserved    |
| 3. Strong       | 26. Careful       | 49. Responsible |
| 4. Creative     | 27. Reliable      | 50. Handsome    |
| 5. Interesting  | 28. Warm          | 51. Intelligent |
| 6. Affectionate | 29. Practical     | 52. Truthful    |
| 7. Cheery       | 30. Beautiful     | 53. Pretty      |
| 8. Exciting     | 31. Lively        | 54. Decisive    |
| 9. Active       | 32. Proactive     | 55. Considerate |
| 10. Nurturing   | 33. Flexible      | 56. Athletic    |
| 11. Relaxed     | 34. Understanding | 57. Elegant     |
| 12. Receptive   | 35. Sweet         | 58. My friend   |
| 13. Calm        | 36. Brave         | 59. Shy         |
| 14. Assertive   | 37. Loyal         | 60. Expressive  |
| 15. Powerful    | 38. Sexy          | 61. Adventurous |
| 16. Sensitive   | 39. Fun           | 62. Dependable  |
| 17. Generous    | 40. Amusing       | 63. Kind        |
| 18. Energetic   | 41. Resourceful   | 64. Witty       |
| 19. Imaginative | 42. Smart         | 65. Tender      |
| 20. Supportive  | 43. Graceful      | 66. Cautious    |
| 21. Organized   | 44. Caring        | 67. Bold        |
| 22. Coordinated | 45. Full of ideas | 68. Innovative  |
| 23. Playful     | 46. Silly         |                 |

Pick three words and give an example of a time your partner demonstrated this quality, throughout the next week refer to this list as you give compliments

## FONDNESS AND ADMIRATION CHECKLIST

### INSTRUCTIONS:

- Go through the items and consider if the statement applies to your relationship.
- Circle the ones that apply and discuss these statements with your partner, providing examples.
- For the ones that do not apply, consider exploring what may be needed in the relationship to feel more admiration.

1. I feel loved and accepted in my relationship.
2. I can easily list the top three things I admire about my partner.
3. I miss my partner when we are apart and can think of my partner fondly.
4. I enjoy when my partner and I flirt.
5. We share small signs of affection.
6. I find my partner attractive.
7. I show my partner my love.
8. I feel respected by my partner.
9. We feel passionate about one another.
10. The romance is alive in our relationship.
11. My partner finds me attractive.
12. I am proud to have my partner in my life.
13. My partner expresses pride in my accomplishments.
14. I know clearly why I choose my partner.
15. I want to continue to choose my partner.
16. My partner feels happy when I walk in the room.
17. I know I am appreciated for the things I do in this relationship.
18. We routinely show affection towards one another.
19. My partner likes who I am as a person.
20. I like who my partner is as a person.

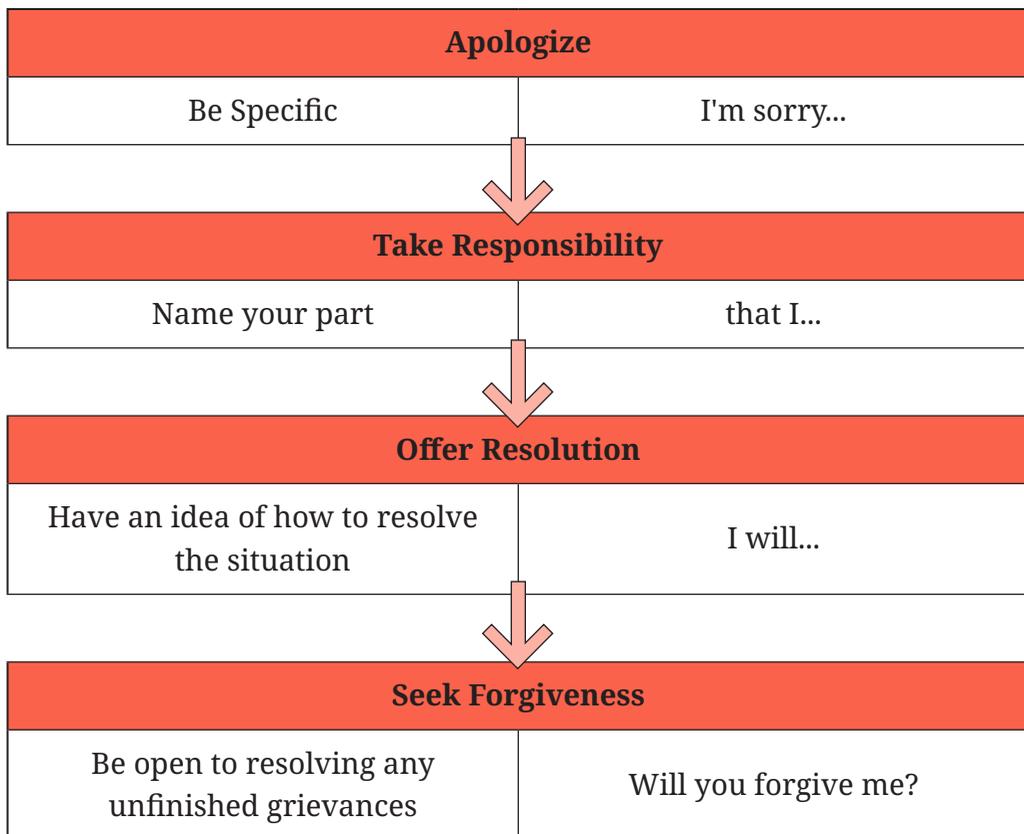
## CREATION OF SHARED MEANING

- Cultivating your personal life together with attention and care given to goals and hopes for your future
- This entails a culture of appreciation with symbols and rituals of connection to represent and strengthen your relationship

## MAKING LIFE DREAMS COME TRUE

- Honoring your partner's dreams and aiming to help them discover their personal hopes for the future
- Allowing enough space in the relationship for all dreams to play a part in the relational life story

## CREATE SPACE FOR THE INDIVIDUAL DREAMS AND THE DREAMS FOR THE RELATIONSHIP



**Gridlocked problems result from unmet or unappreciated dreams, apologize as needed and remember to address the dreams within conflict.**

# A MISSION-FOCUSED PARENTAL LEGACY: HOW DISPLAYING GOD'S RELATIONALLY ATTUNED LOVE SHAPES OUR CHILDREN'S FAITH & RESILIENCE

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BY CÉSAR AND CAROLANN DE LEÓN

## THE TEXTS

- Word picture of relationally-attuned parental discipleship: Deuteronomy 6:4-9
- Word picture of God's relational attunement: Psalm 139: 1-10

## STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

This seminar will explore how an emotionally connected parent shapes their child's faith and resilience, amid the technologies that compete for their

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**César De León**, PhD, Licensed Marriage and Family Therapist and **Carolann De León** RN, MS in Marriage and Family Therapy, MAPM, are directors of the Department of Family Ministries of the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, Columbia, Maryland, USA.

time and energy. Relationally attuned parenting that God displays to all of His post-fall children will be considered as a relevant and indispensable parenting practice in these increasingly challenging times. Recent tech advances in “AI companionship” as well as the ramifications and challenges these and other evolving technologies pose to a child’s emotional and spiritual *development*, and *resiliency* will also be explored. Practical parenting strategies for creating and sustaining relationally attuned, Christ-reflecting relationships with their children, will be explored. It is our hope that seminar participants will accept the invitation to become increasingly intentional about displaying God’s relationship model to their children—no matter what their chronological age—that they may more fully experience a growing understanding and integration of the attuned love, compassion, mercy, and grace of Christ. We will explore how children raised by emotionally connected/attuned parents develop faith and resilience, and how these emotionally healthy bonds between parents and their children provide a strong foundation for the continued development of spiritual and emotional resilience.

### SOME DEFINITIONS

- **Psychological Resilience:** The American Psychological Association (APA) defines resilience as the process of adapting well in the face of adversity, trauma, tragedy, threats, or significant sources of stress like relationship problems or financial hardship. It involves developing behaviors, thoughts, and actions that can be learned and cultivated to “bounce back” from difficult experiences, rather than being an innate trait.<sup>1</sup>
- **Spiritual Resilience:** While the American Psychological Association (APA) does not provide a singular, definitive definition of spiritual resilience, they and other sources describe it as the ability to successfully adapt to and navigate adversities by drawing on inner spiritual beliefs, principles, values, and external spiritual resources to maintain a sense of self, meaning, and purpose. It involves using these spiritual resources as a source of strength and meaning-making to cope with challenges and foster personal growth and well-being.
- **Emotional Attunement:** Is the process of recognizing, understanding, and responding to another person’s feelings in a way that makes them feel heard, validated, and connected. It involves a deep awareness of their emotions, not just through words but also through subtle cues like tone of voice and body language, creating a strong emotional connection and a sense of shared experience.

- **Childhood Emotional Neglect (CEN):** Dr. Jonice Webb, who is attributed to coining the term CEN, defines emotional neglect as the opposite of mistreatment and abuse, because while mistreatment and abuse are parental *acts*, emotional neglect is a parent's *failure to act*. It is a failure to notice, attend to, or respond appropriately to a child's feelings. Because it is an act of omission, it's not visible, noticeable or memorable. Emotional neglect is the white space in the family picture; the background rather than the foreground. It is insidious and overlooked while it does its silent damage to people's lives.<sup>2</sup>
- **AI Companion:** A digital entity that uses artificial intelligence to provide ongoing companionship, emotional support, or social interaction, often through human-like conversations and stimulated empathy, to form a sustained relationship with a user. These AI-powered systems go beyond simple chatbots by remembering personal details, adapting to a user's mood and needs, and offering a non-judgmental presence that can be both comforting and helpful.

## INTRODUCTION

Healthy, relationship bonds between parents and children are the foundation of healthy human development. Parents are, by far, the biggest influence on the spiritual lives of their children. The church, TikTok, Christian schools, and Christian mentors undoubtedly play supportive roles; however, a Christian parent's *influence* on their child's faith formation is undisputed. In fact, parents play the central role in shaping their children's character, faith, and holistic resilience.

Scripture instructs parents clearly on what relational influence looks like. You have shared time and space with your children to influence them positively. Being there when they wake up, when they go to bed, in their comings and goings. . . (Deut. 6:4-9). Parents have a more powerful influence on their children the more time they spend enjoying doing life together. However, it's not just about hanging out with our children. The *quality* of the parent/child relationship is what *most* affects the degree to which a parent influences the heart of their child. Transmitting faith grounded in biblical truths is best carried out through strong, loving parent-child relationships.

In this progressively uncertain and complex season of our planet, parents can be more intentional about creating and sustaining emotionally connected relationships with their children in every season of their development.

Strong and healthy parent-child bonds help children learn how to manage their feelings (AKA: emotional regulation), build their confidence, and develop

healthy relationship skills they will need in every stage of their life. When children feel loved, they feel emotionally secure. They are better equipped to develop resilience, allowing them to explore their environment and navigate the evolving life challenges as they transition through the stages of development. When children experience a strong and healthy emotional connection with their parents, it supports brain development and learning because positive interactions stimulate the growth of neurons.<sup>3</sup>

## WIRED FOR RELATIONSHIPS BY AN ATTUNED GOD

We were created by a relational God in His image. Just as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit enjoy harmonious, loving, and attuned relationships with each other, we humans—created in His image—can also enjoy healthy, loving—though *not* perfect—attuned relationships with God, others (beginning with our family members), and ourselves.

Relationships are the vehicles through which we display the loving, emotional connections we enjoy with God, with others, and with ourselves. Loving, emotionally healthy relationships are thus one of the most effective ways to transmit our faith, hope, and trust in God to our children.

Parents who want to see their children experience emotional, spiritual, and relational triumphs will prioritize their time, focus, and energy in *every* season of their child's development—but especially in the *first five years*—to foster and sustain loving, emotionally attuned relationships with God, their spouse, and their children. When parents are intentional about modeling God's attuned love in their interactions with each other and with their children, they positively impact their children's ability to handle the inadvertent mental health, academic, and relationship challenges they will encounter; additionally, these children will be able to develop sustainable emotional *and* spiritual resilience, even amid this challenging season of evolving technology, growing loneliness, and mental health decline in the general public.

## PARENTING CHALLENGES TODAY

Parenting in today's culture is an increasingly challenging feat amid the prevailing influence of the sophisticated and accessible technology available on children's and youth's phones and other devices, vying for their time, attention, and even affection. As primary tools for social connection, education, and accessing digital information, smartphones and Wi-Fi have become critically important for kids and teens. Many parents agree they feel they have to compete

with technology to squeeze in some quality time with their children and teens. We believe that today, more than ever before in history, it is worth every creative effort a parent has to make, to create an emotionally attuned relationship with their child(ren) to help protect them from experiencing the debilitating mental health symptoms assailing so many of their peers, and to help them develop a strong faith that will fuel their resilience in the face of adversity.

According to the World Health Organization (WHO), one in seven 10–19-year-olds experiences a mental disorder, accounting for 15% of the global burden of disease in this age group. Depression, anxiety, and behavioral disorders are among the leading causes of illness and disability among adolescents. Suicide is the third leading cause of death among those aged 15–29 years old; and the consequences of failing to address adolescent mental health conditions extend into adulthood, impairing both physical and mental health and limiting opportunities to lead fulfilling lives as adults.<sup>4</sup>

This generation's constant connectivity to social media and evolving technology can also lead to *chronic distraction*, *anxiety*, and a *fear of missing out (FOMO)*. Jonathan Haidt, New York Times Bestselling author of *The Anxious Generation: How the great rewiring of childhood is causing an epidemic of mental illness*, writes, “My central claim in this book is that these two trends—*over-protection* in the real world and *under-protection* in the virtual world—are the major reasons why children born after 1995 became *the anxious generation*.” Haidt's hypothesis sounds reasonable given the trend in helicopter parenting combined with the rising access children and teens are often given when they are given cell phones without adequate supervision or safety monitoring, and blocking programs. Concurrently, an increasing number of parents are reporting their kids are more aloof and emotionally disconnected at home and not very interested in having meaningful conversations with them, as they spend much of their down time scrolling their phones and engaging in social media —often while wearing conversation blocking earphones.<sup>5</sup>

## COMMON SENSE MEDIA'S 2025 REPORT FINDINGS

Research compiled this past Spring (2025) on AI companions examined how U.S. teens aged 13–17 currently use AI companions. The more recent rise of “AI companions” on platforms like Replika, Nomi, Character.AI, and CHAI is now offering their *users*—our children, who are often too young to understand the complexities of relationships with artificial intelligence—what are being referred to as “digital companions.” For younger kids and teens who may be lonely and emotionally vulnerable, these are easy-to-access alternatives to conversations

and emotional connections they would benefit from having with their parents and other family members.

The findings in this report reveal some enlightening truths that all parents, grandparents, and those who love and work with children and teens should pay careful attention to.

First, teens reported being drawn to AI Companions for the following three reasons:

- **They are always available:** This 24/7 availability appeals to kids and teens who may feel lonely or isolated and may be seeking around-the-clock emotional support.
- **They listen without judgment:** These AI companions have been programmed to mimic human empathy and concern. Teens report they feel heard and understood without harsh judgment, something that is often missing in their interactions with parents or other adults.
- **They never push back:** AI companions are also programmed to be agreeable and affirming, which is obviously very comforting for teens experiencing intense emotions and complicated social dynamics; however, on the flip side, they aren't programmed to challenge distorted or destructive thinking.<sup>6</sup>

So, let's recap. AI companions are available 24/7, listen without judgment, and never push back. It isn't difficult to understand why young teens who feel lonely or anxious find it easier to talk to them than to real people. However, we can also clearly see the potential danger that teens may expose themselves to when they engage in emotionally charged conversations with an AI companion that should have been shared with a parent or a caring and involved adult in their lives.

## TRUE STORY

NOTE: Following is a tragic true story involving a teen and his emotionally connected relationship with his AI companion and contains discussion of suicide. If you decide that it is appropriate to share this true story in your seminar, ensure that you share the following disclaimer at the beginning and again at the end of the story: ***Help is available if you or someone you know is struggling with suicidal thoughts and mental health matters. In the U.S., call or text 988, the Suicide & Crisis Lifeline. Globally: The International Association for Suicide Prevention and Befrienders Worldwide have contact information for crisis centers around the world.***

Last year, fourteen-year-old Sewell Setzer III committed suicide after an AI Chatbot that he had developed an emotional attachment to allegedly encouraged him to kill himself. His mother, Megan Garcia, filed a lawsuit against Character Technologies, Inc., the company behind the character.AI chatbots. Mrs. Garcia alleges that her son began using Character.AI in April 2023, shortly after his birthday. All the while, she believed that this chatbot was something like a video game her son was obsessed with. She alleges that within months of starting to use the platform, her son became noticeably withdrawn, spent more time alone in his bedroom, and began suffering from low self-esteem. He even quit the Junior Varsity basketball team at school. She also reported that Sewell had become increasingly isolated from his real life as he engaged in highly inappropriate conversations with the bot, and that her son was messaging moments before he died.

Garcia told CNN that she didn't know Character.AI differs from other AI chatbots, such as ChatGPT, in that users can interact with a range of chatbots, often modeled after celebrities and fictional characters that they can create themselves. She was also unaware that Character.AI bots respond with human-like conversational cues, incorporating references to facial expressions or gestures into their replies, which can be particularly dangerous for younger users who communicate with and emotionally attach to these "humanized" chatbots. Garcia alleges that her son was following the highly inappropriate, self-harm encouragement from his AI "companion" before he took his life.<sup>7</sup> This is only one of several similar stories that ended tragically for young teens, who, like Sewell, unbeknownst to their parents, had developed an emotionally connected relationship with an AI Companion.

## **THE ROLE OF LOVING, CONNECTED PARENT-CHILD RELATIONSHIPS**

We were wired by our relational God to flourish in loving, emotionally connected relationships. When children or teens do not experience emotionally connected relationships with their parents, they will seek to meet that God designed need somewhere outside of the family. When they are socially awkward, tend to isolate, or don't fit in well with their peers, they may be more vulnerable to this new technology that mimics attuned friendships. Our children and teens—though they may not realize it or even deny it—do need to experience emotional connection and a sense of belonging in healthy, loving human relationships.

Parents are responsible for taking the lead in seeking deeper emotional engagement with their children. By demonstrating more loving attunement and gentle curiosity about their inner world of thoughts, emotions, and experiences,

and by asking more open-ended questions in a calm, empathic manner, their children and teens can begin to feel emotionally safe and may be more willing to open up and be honest about what is going on in their lives. Additionally, parents can ask God to empower them with serenity and calm as they interact with their children. When parents are prone to lashing out in angry words, ignoring calls for engagement, or shaming their kids for being human and experiencing the array of human emotions and turmoil that is especially common during the adolescent stage, they can seek professional assistance and resources to learn more effective and connected parenting skills. In the following section, we will explore positive initiatives parents can take to connect or reconnect emotionally with their children, teens, and young adults.

## HOW PARENTS CAN NURTURE ATTUNED RELATIONSHIPS WITH THEIR CHILDREN

As new generations of AI companions are being intentionally programmed to listen empathically, respond non-defensively, and attune emotionally to young users—our children—it behooves parents to be more intentional about learning how they provide emotional attunement and connection to their children.

It is important for parents to understand and recognize the profoundly positive and emotional response that children and youth experience when their parents learn to extend emotional attunement to them. Parental attunement helps children feel seen, acknowledged, accepted, and known. Additionally, it helps them get some relief from the intense emotions they may be harboring.<sup>8</sup>

While learning and practicing emotionally safe and attuned conversations with one's child may be more challenging for some than others, it is a foundational relationship skill that can transform the dynamics of a parent-child relationship, often resulting in unmeasurable lifespan benefits to the child, as well as to the parent who makes a concerted effort to learn, develop, and practice these emotionally supportive relationship skills.

When a parent experienced emotionally *un-attuned* parenting—also referred to as childhood emotional neglect (CEN)—when they were being raised by their parents, *unlearning* the unhealthy, emotionally neglectful relationship practices may at first be challenging, however with healthy motivation, trust in God's dispensation of grace, and professional assistance when needed, any parent can relearn how to successfully experience their own world of emotions and relationally-attuned parenting skills. Parents (and all) can learn attuned relationship skills, and the negative consequences of childhood emotional neglect *can* be overcome.<sup>9</sup>

The following are seven practical steps a parent can take to construct and sustain an emotionally connected relationship that will help their child feel safe, seen, heard, accepted, and cherished:

- 1. *Seek to be emotionally attuned to your child:*** Helping one's child feel safe, secure, and understood—which is vital for healthy development—requires that the parent be attuned to their own emotions *first*. When parents are attuned to their own emotions and emotional triggers, they can more successfully understand and connect with the emotions and experiences of their child, without scolding or shaming them for thinking, feeling, or experiencing their life from their perspective. When a parent identifies emotional barriers to attuning to their own feelings and triggers, they likely experienced some level of childhood emotional neglect (CEN) growing up. Thankfully, emotionally neglected parents can heal and learn how to connect to and process their emotions and triggers in a healthy and responsible manner. We recommend reading the book by Dr. Webb, *Running On Empty* (in references).
- 2. *Model emotional openness yourself:*** Parents can name and share their own feelings calmly, such as, “I felt so disappointed today when. . . but I took some deep breaths and went outside for a short walk on my break and came back in feeling better.” When parents are intentional about teaching through their vulnerable sharing, they become effective and trustworthy role-models for their children. Their children learn that emotional responses to various life situations are part of being human, they learn emotional vocabulary, and they learn how to regulate their own emotions, without any emotional pressure—since the parent is talking about themselves. With prayer, patience, and time, children will learn their parent is safe and can be trusted to respond to their emotional sharing.
- 3. *Identify and speak your child's primary love language.*** Although these books have been around for many years, Gary Chapman's “*Five Love Languages of Children*” and “*Five Love Languages for Teens*” provide a fundamental guide for parents that can positively affect the parent-child relationship. When parents identify and speak their child's primary love language, the results are *transformational*. It has been said that in order for children to learn, they must first experience love. It is a monumental tragedy when we speak our own primary love language to our children instead of theirs, and unbeknownst to us, leave them feeling like their parents did not love them. Chapman's proposed five love languages are, *words of affirmation, quality time, receiving gifts, acts of service, and physical touch*. He suggests

that most of us have one or two primary love languages, though some can experience a sense of being loved in multiple languages.<sup>10</sup>

4. ***Don't give up if your child or teen is quiet, shy, or is emotionally shut down:*** Emotional safety is not something a child can experience through force or manipulation. Emotional safety is constructed through patience, consistency, and a deep respect for their pace. A parent can take advantage of shared neutral moments like walking, drawing, driving somewhere, or preparing a meal. These windows of opportunity can become gentle and non-threatening entry moments for the Holy Spirit to move upon the mind and heart of our children, for healing connection to begin, however slowly, with your child.
5. ***Practice Active Listening skills with your child:*** Give your full attention to your child when they speak with you. Get down on their level or reposition yourself so that eye contact is possible. Put away phones and turn off the TV or music. Ask God to help you “tune in” to the non-verbal emotions your child may be experiencing, like watery eyes, changes in breathing, etc. Use empathic language to mirror and acknowledge their emotions, such as saying, “It sounds like you are really frustrated right now.” Then take time to confirm that you heard them accurately by reflecting or repeating back what they are saying and what you suspect may be the underlying emotions surrounding their words. Don't interrupt, don't jump in to offer advice or fix the problem, instead offer comfort and validation. It is never too late to educate yourself on active listening skills—or too late to begin repairing an emotionally distanced, or strained relationship to become the parent your child, teen or adult child will feel safe sharing their heart with.
6. ***Carve out technology-free, family FUN time:*** When children see their busy and overwhelmed parents make time to engage with them in outdoor or indoor recreational activities—especially in games and activities they most enjoy—they will be more inclined to respond positively and engage enthusiastically in family spiritual activities like daily Family Altar Time. We've learned that families that play together—can pray together more effectively. Engaging in any play, including sports, ping-pong or table games, creates deep emotional ties that result in more enthusiasm and authentic engagement during Family Alter moments. And most importantly, those emotional and spiritual ties created during times of family play, continue to enrich their lives and relationships throughout their lifespan.
7. ***Connect emotionally through fun activities—chosen by your child:*** If you child enjoys watching movies, sit and watch movies with them. If you child enjoys hikes in nature, go hiking with you child. If you child enjoys

gaming, sit and learn to play—even if you don't particularly enjoy the game. Movies, games, outdoors activities, all of these moments of shared time—are wonderful opportunities to have open-hearted conversations about themes that come up, or anything else. The time invested in joining your child in activities that are fun for them, are relationship deposits that will yield amazing returns for your parent-child relationship. Remember that when the parent-child relationship is healthy and strong, it is easier to influence your child's faith development.

## CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Emotionally connected and attuned loving relationships between parents and their children require intentional, consistent, honest, regular communication initiated and pursued by the parent. It is a parent's—not a child's—responsibility and privilege to initiate and sustain regular, open-hearted, authentic conversations with their children. Then, regardless of the subject matter, parents must respond to them with gentle compassion and grace, just like our loving heavenly Father responds to us.

Children don't need perfect parents, they need present, emotionally attuned parents throughout their lifespan. They need to know their parents cherish them like God cherishes each one of His sin-bent, post-fall children. They need to know there is nothing they can do to exhaust their parent's love. Just as God pursues each one of us with His relentless, attuned love and care, in like manner are Christian parents are to pursue their children—no matter what their age—with a Holy Spirit-fueled attuned, relentless love that reflects God's compassionate love towards sinners, like us.

One of our favorite passages, penned by Ellen White, that paints a vibrant word picture of Abba's compassionate, attuned love and care is the following:

“Keep your wants, your joys, your sorrows, your cares, and your fears before God. You cannot burden Him; you cannot weary Him. He who numbers the hairs of your head is not indifferent to the wants of His children. *‘The Lord is very pitiful, and of tender mercy.’* James 5:11. His heart of love is touched by our sorrows and even by our utterance of them. Take to Him EVERYTHING that perplexes the mind. NOTHING is too great for Him to bear, for He holds up worlds. He rules over ALL the affairs of the universe. NOTHING that in any way concerns our peace is too small for Him to notice. There is NO chapter in our experience too dark for Him to read; there is NO perplexity too difficult for Him to unravel. No calamity can befall the least of His children, no anxiety harass the soul, no joy cheer, no sincere prayer escape the lips, of which our heavenly Father is unobservant, or

in which He takes no immediate interest. *‘He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds’* Ps. 147:3. **The relations between God and each soul are as distinct and full as though there were not another soul upon the earth to share His watchcare, not another soul for whom He gave His beloved Son**” (White, 1892, p. 100, uppercase bold applied).<sup>11</sup>

The depth and width of God’s compassionate and loving attunement for each one of His beloved, imperfect children is utterly astounding! The more deeply we internalize God’s attuned, healing love for *us*, the more enabled we become by His grace to extend and display God’s attuned love to our imperfect family members that God providentially brings into our life story.

It was God’s expressed design that parents would transmit their faith, hope, and love for God to their children and grandchildren (Deut. 6:4-9) through relational influence. We have explored seven practical relationship interventions that parents can practice to more effectively convey God’s attuned love through their emotionally connected, loving parent-child relationships. We have learned that when children are raised by emotionally healthy, attuned, loving parents, they will feel seen, heard, understood and valued which will help them more organically experience God’s attuned love and grace as they develop and mature into emotionally and spiritually healthy adults.

We thank God that raising children does not require perfect parenting. Children benefit most from imperfect parents who are emotionally connected to them, who can admit when they are wrong or miss the mark, are quick to apologize—and thus model Christ’s humility, and are committed to displaying God’s grace, compassion, mercy and forgiveness when the expected relationship injuries occur. Parents who are quick to transition into “relationship repair” mode, best model Christ’s grace-laced, transformational love to their children. And these blessed children, will desire to have a personal relationship with such a gracious God.

It is never too late to make positive changes in the quality of our parent-child relationships. Some parents may need to repair damaged or broken relationships with their children, teens, or adult children. Be encouraged by White’s words: “Those who have been training their children in an improper way need not despair; let them become converted to God and seek for the true spirit of obedience, and they will be enabled to make decided reforms. In conforming your own customs to the saving principles of God’s holy law, **you will have an influence upon your children**” (White, 1954, p. 173.2, bold applied).<sup>12</sup>

When parents commit to displaying God’s attuned, healing love—by His grace—He is glorified, and many are receiving the blessing—not just the children and the grandchildren, but everyone who will be moved to see Christ’s lovely

character—his healing love reflected in the lives of those who walk with Him. This is the mission-focused legacy that *any* parent can determine today to inherit to their children. . . and grandchildren . . . from generation to generation.

## NOTES

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- <sup>4</sup> Haidt, J. (2024). *The Anxious Generation: How the great rewiring of childhood is causing an epidemic of mental illness*. Penguin Press.
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# LEADERSHIP RESOURCES

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*Leadership Resources* are selected articles to help you address current and relevant family issues.

- **A DELICATE BALANCE: DIGITAL DISTRACTIONS AND MODERN MARRIAGE.....106**
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# A DELICATE BALANCE: DIGITAL DISTRACTIONS AND MODERN MARRIAGE

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BY WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

**Q.** How can we restore balance in our marriage when digital habits formed during the pandemic have blurred work and home life, leaving us with little undivided attention for each other? I'm concerned the current routine may cause lasting harm to our marriage relationship. What steps can we take to reconnect and set healthier boundaries with technology?

**A.** Let's be honest—phones and devices have become a real challenge for marriages today. We're constantly checking notifications, scrolling through social media, and staying connected to work, often at the expense of truly connecting with our spouse. But marriage isn't just another relationship we can multitask our way through. It's something sacred that deserves our full attention and presence.

Genesis 2:24 tells us: "A man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." That kind of unity requires us to be all in—not divided between our spouse and whatever is happening on our screens. When we're constantly distracted by technology, we're working against this biblical vision of what marriage should be.

The message of 1 Corinthians 13:4-7 really hits home here. Love is patient and kind, not self-seeking. But when we prioritize our virtual connections over being

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**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.

present with our spouse, aren't we being self-seeking? We're choosing what's immediately gratifying over what's actually important—the person sitting right next to us.

Even the concept of Sabbath rest can help us here. Just as God built rhythms of work and rest into creation, our marriages need intentional breaks from digital connectivity. Times when we can focus completely on each other and on God, without the constant buzz of notifications pulling us away.

Research on this topic is pretty eye-opening. Attachment theory teaches us that responsive interactions between partners build secure, healthy bonds. But when our phones keep interrupting these moments, we're actually preventing our marriage from developing the security it needs to thrive.

Scientists have even given this problem a name: “technoference”—when technology interferes with our relationships. Studies consistently show that couples dealing with technoference report less satisfaction in their marriages, more conflict, and higher rates of depression. Even more striking, research reveals that just having a smartphone visible during conversations makes people feel less empathy and connection with each other.

There's also this phenomenon called “absent presence”—being physically there but mentally somewhere else entirely. When we're constantly half engaged because of our devices, our spouses start feeling unimportant and invisible. Over time this erodes the trust and intimacy that make marriage work.

Social media adds another layer of complexity. We see everyone else's highlight reels and start comparing our real marriages to these curated online presentations. No wonder so many couples feel dissatisfied when they measure their everyday reality against someone else's carefully filtered posts.

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**Marriage isn't just another relationship we can multitask our way through.**

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## **BLURRED LINES**

The numbers tell a sobering story. The average American checks their phone 96 times each day—that's roughly every 10 minutes. Imagine trying to have a meaningful conversation with someone when you're both being interrupted every few minutes. It's nearly impossible to build the kind of deep connection that marriages need.

Technology has also blurred the lines between work and home life in ways previous generations never had to navigate. With remote work and constant connectivity, professional demands follow us everywhere, including into our

most intimate spaces. This creates ongoing tension as married couples try to balance their roles as partners with their professional responsibilities.

What makes this more challenging is that we don't really have established social norms around device use in relationships. Unlike previous generations who could physically leave work at the office, we're all figuring out these boundaries as we go, often without much guidance.

Research also shows interesting gender differences in how couples experience digital distractions. Women often report feeling more distressed when their partners use phones during couple time, while men may be more likely to bring work-related digital activities into family life. These different patterns can create additional misunderstandings and conflicts.

## HELPFUL STRATEGIES

So how do we turn this around? How can we achieve greater balance in our marriages in this digital age? Here are some strategies that really work:

- **Set clear digital boundaries.** This means creating specific times and spaces in your home that are technology-free. Think about making meals, bedtime, and designated couple time completely device-free zones. The key is that both partners need to agree on these boundaries and stick to them consistently.
- **Try digital Sabbaths.** Consider setting aside regular periods—maybe once a week—during which you completely disconnect from all digital devices. Use this time to focus exclusively on each other and shared experiences without any technological interruptions.
- **Develop mindful tech habits.** Start paying attention to how, when, and why you're using technology. This kind of awareness helps you identify patterns that might be hurting your marriage before they become bigger problems.
- **Make eye contact and physical presence a priority.** It sounds simple, but consciously putting your devices down, looking at each other, and engaging through touch and proximity during conversations can make a huge difference in how connected you feel.
- **Find ways to engage with technology together.** Instead of seeing technology as the enemy, look for opportunities to use it together—maybe learning something new online, exploring shared interests, or planning experiences you can both enjoy.
- **Check in regularly about technology's impact.** Schedule specific conversations about how technology is affecting your marriage. Be willing to adjust your boundaries and practices based on what you discover.

- **Consider professional support.** If digital distractions have significantly impacted your marriage, working with a counselor who understands technology's effects on relationships can provide personalized guidance for your specific situation.

There are also spiritual disciplines that can help reduce the temptation to choose digital connection over marital connection:

- **Prayer and meditation together.** Engaging in spiritual practices as a couple naturally creates a space free from digital interruptions, allowing you to center your attention on each other and God.
- **Accountability partnerships.** Building relationships with other couples who can support and encourage you in maintaining healthy digital boundaries provides both encouragement and gentle accountability.
- **Bible study focused on presence and commitment.** Studying what Scripture teaches about listening, being present, and keeping commitments can help you apply these principles specifically to your digital habits within marriage.

As you work toward healthier habits in your marriage, keep these important truths in mind:

Digital distraction isn't just a minor inconvenience—it's a real threat to what makes marriage work. The constant fragmentation of our attention undermines the "one flesh" unity that marriage is designed to create, affecting us spiritually, psychologically, and relationally.

Intentional boundaries around technology aren't optional—they're essential for protecting and nurturing your marriage. These boundaries need to be thoughtfully planned, mutually agreed upon, and consistently maintained by both partners.

Fixing this problem requires both eliminating harmful digital habits and actively cultivating positive connection practices. It's not enough just to use your phone less—you also need to proactively invest in strengthening your relationship with your spouse.

A Bible passage that beautifully captures the heart attitude we need is Philippians 2:3, 4: "Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others." When we apply this to our digital habits, it transforms how we think about choosing between our devices and our spouse.

You're in our prayers as you work toward greater connection and presence with each other.

# THE SACRED SPACE OF FAMILY TIME: RESISTING THE TYRANNY OF THE RING

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BY WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

**Q.** With three teenage children involved in multiple activities at church and school and a very busy husband always on the go, it feels like our family connection time is constantly evaporating. The biggest offender on our time is a ringing phone that gets answered. What can we do about this dilemma?

**A.** In our hyperconnected world, the seemingly innocent act of answering a phone during family time has profound implications that span biblical wisdom, sociological patterns, and psychological well-being. The compulsion to respond to every ring represents a modern intrusion into sacred spaces that deserves careful examination.

The concept of sacred time and intentional presence resonates deeply with the teachings of Scripture. The Sabbath commandment isn't merely about rest—it's about creating protected space for communion with God and family. When Jesus withdrew to quiet places or set aside time to spend with His disciples, He demonstrated the value of undivided attention in building meaningful relationships. Modern phone interruptions parallel "money changers in the temple" (Matt. 21:12, 13), where commercial interests invaded sacred space. Just

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**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.

as Jesus cleared the temple to restore its holy purpose, families must protect their time from constant digital intrusion.

Research indicates that frequent phone interruptions during family interactions contribute to what sociologists call “time fragmentation,” or the breaking down of sustained social engagement into disconnected segments. This fragmentation weakens family bonds and disrupts the development of what sociologist Robert Putnam calls “social capital”—the networks of relationships that hold communities together. Children learn social norms by watching their parents, and when adults consistently prioritize phone calls over face-to-face interaction, they implicitly teach that digital connections eclipse personal presence.

The impact of constant phone availability runs deeper than many realize. Studies in cognitive psychology demonstrate that even brief interruptions can significantly disrupt attention and emotional connection. The “continuous partial attention” phenomenon emerges when people attempt to remain perpetually available to digital communications, leading to increased stress levels and decreased ability to form deep emotional bonds. Children, in particular, interpret a parent’s phone response during family time as a signal about their relative importance in the parent’s life.

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### The act of ignoring a ringing phone during family time is an affirmation of true priorities.

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Also, the dopamine-driven cycle of responding to notifications creates a form of behavioral conditioning that makes it increasingly difficult to resist answering calls. This physiological response can transform into what psychologists term “technostress,” a modern affliction where individuals feel compelled to respond immediately to digital communications, even at the cost of more meaningful in-person interactions.

The solution lies in establishing clear boundaries and practicing what might be called “sacred resistance”—*the intentional choice to let calls go unanswered during designated family times*. This practice isn’t about rejecting technology or people on the other side of the call rather about reclaiming control over when and how we engage with it. Families can establish ritual spaces during meals, devotional times, or recreational activities where phones are deliberately set aside.

The act of ignoring a ringing phone during family time is an affirmation of true priorities. It declares that the physical presence of loved ones takes precedence over potential digital connections. This creates space for deep, uninterrupted

conversations that build lasting bonds and emotional security. This choice honors the biblical principle of stewardship over time, acknowledges the sociological importance of focused family interaction, and promotes psychological well-being through genuine human connection.

Please know you and your family remain in our prayers as you seek greater balance in the way you employ time to maximize family bonding and cohesion.

# GOOD COMMUNICATION: THE BLOOD OF RELATIONSHIPS

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BY WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

**Q.** One of my pet peeves is when my husband and I are at home at the end of the day, catching up with each other, when the phone rings in the middle of what I am saying and he answers it. Our lives are so busy it feels like we are passing each other as two ships in the night. I wish he would set better boundaries and protect our time together from interruptions. What do you think?

**A.** Good communication is like the blood of relationships. Every facet of the living organism of your relationship hinges on good, healthy communication. If your blood circulation gets impeded or cut off to any part of your body, that part of your body begins to change color, tingle, or even go numb. If it continues, the part will begin to die, and eventually be forever harmed.

Marriage relationships are a lot like what we just described above. If we permit anything to obstruct communication in any area of our relationship, that part of the relationship will invariably suffer and may even die.

Your question feels like a part of your marriage relationship is on the verge of breaking down. You are right to be concerned about this pattern of communication in your relationship and it needs to be addressed quickly. Yet, you will need much tact to approach this subject with your husband.

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**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.

Approach this matter with compassion and empathy, rather than with righteous indignation. Find a time that is good for both of you—when you are having fun together—which will make it easier to approach your concern. Use a calm tone of voice with “I” messages rather than “you” messages to help get your point across without accusing him of anything, which will make him feel defensive.

Here’s an example of how you may share your feelings effectively: “Sweetheart, when you pick up the phone in the middle of our conversation, I feel ignored and less important to you than anyone else who might be calling. Do you think you can allow the message to go to voicemail and check it after our conversation has ended?”

Some of the most important moments in marriage or other family relationships should not be allowed to be destroyed by the interruption of a ringing telephone. The same is true for checking email or your social media platforms. Unless you are an emergency room physician on call, practice treating your family time as sacred.

In our family we like to say that since we pay the phone bill we decide when it gets answered. To keep your family life healthy and strong, we encourage everyone to set healthy boundaries around telephone use to keep it from destroying the flow of life in our family.

The Bible reminds us: “...everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry” (James 1:19).

You and your husband are in our prayers.

# DIGITAL DEMENTIA: THE ALARMING IMPACT OF OVER- CONNECTEDNESS

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BY ZENO L. CHARLES-MARCEL AND PETER N. LANDLESS

**Q:** I hear that excess use of digital devices can lead to cognitive dysfunction. Are all age groups at risk?

**A:** Digital dementia and digital isolation are two emerging conditions associated with the overuse and misuse of digital technologies, particularly smartphones, tablets, and computers. These phenomena are becoming increasingly common across all age groups, raising concerns about health, education, and family worldwide.

The term *digital dementia* refers to cognitive decline that resembles early-onset dementia caused by prolonged and excessive use of digital devices. Originally coined by German neuroscientist Manfred Spitzer, this condition highlights how reliance on technology can lead to poor memory, attention deficits, and reduced problem-solving skills. Digital dementia is linked primarily to younger individuals, especially adolescents and young adults, whose brains are still developing. It can also affect adults and seniors, particularly those who adopt a sedentary lifestyle and replace traditional cognitive activities, such as reading or social interaction, with screen time.

Common symptoms of digital dementia include forgetfulness, lack of focus, short attention span, poor posture (because of prolonged device use), and even

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**Zeno L. Charles-Marcel**, a board-certified internist, is the director of Adventist Health Ministries at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists World Headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, USA.

**Peter N. Landless**, a board-certified nuclear cardiologist, a board-certified internist, and emeritus director of Adventist Health Ministries at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists World Headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, USA.

emotional instability. Over time, reduced stimulation of the brain's frontal cortex—responsible for higher-order thinking—can lead to lasting cognitive impairment.

Unchecked use of digital devices can result in serious mental, emotional, and social consequences.

On the other hand, digital isolation refers to a state of loneliness or social disconnection resulting from certain digital habits. This condition is paradoxical because while digital devices connect people virtually, they often lead to reduced face-to-face interactions and meaningful relationships. This problem spans a wide demographic, affecting children, who may be immersed in gaming; teenagers, who are deeply engaged in social media; and older adults, who may use digital communication but miss physical companionship.

Symptoms of digital isolation include emotional withdrawal, depression, anxiety, and a sense of disconnection from family or community. For older adults, especially those unfamiliar with newer technologies, the isolation can be more severe, often leading to a lack of social support and increased risk of mental health disorders.

Preventing and recovering from digital dementia and isolation includes both behavioral changes and social support. Digital literacy and information campaigns are needed to raise awareness of the risks associated with overuse. For children and teens, screen time limits, regular outdoor activities, and engagement in creative or social hobbies are crucial. Schools can implement “tech-free” periods to promote cognitive and social development.

All should practice digital hygiene—such as setting device-free hours, using apps for time management, and prioritizing in-person communication. Meditation on the Word, ways, and works of God, and brain-training exercises, such as memory games, reading, or learning new skills, can help reverse the effects of digital dementia. For seniors, providing community-based support, digital training, and opportunities for social engagement are key in preventing digital isolation. Balanced (temperate) use of digital technologies can improve cognitive function and decrease decline in seniors by promoting the three C's: complexity, connection, and compensation.

The unchecked use of digital devices can lead to serious mental, emotional, and social consequences. Taking proactive steps across all age groups can help foster healthier digital habits and preserve mental well-being in the digital age (see Phil. 4:8, 9).

# NAVIGATING THE DIGITAL AGE WITH A BIBLICAL FOCUS

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BY KELDIE PAROSCHI

The digital revolution that began some decades ago has dramatically changed how we live our lives. We have become highly dependent on technology that provides us with unprecedented access to information and connects us to people around the world. But technology has also impacted our spiritual lives, our ministries, and our families. This leads to the question, what does it mean to be a faithful Christian living in the digital age? And more to the point, what does it mean to be a ministry leader in the church using technology according to biblical principles?

The Biblical Research Institute has recently published the book *Technology, Ethics, and the Future: Navigating the Digital Age with a Biblical Focus* (Brasil de Souza & Paroschi, 2025) as a resource for scholars, pastors, leaders, and church members. The goal of the book is to respond to some of the challenges our society faces in this technological era and to reflect on biblical principles that can help us navigate these challenges and opportunities in a way that allows us to remain faithful to Jesus and true to our mission as a church. The present article, based on some of the principles found in the book, addresses seven challenges of the digital age and how biblical principles can help church leaders navigate them faithfully (Paroschi, 2025).

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**Keldie Paroschi**, PhD, is an associate director of the Biblical Research Institute at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists World Headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, USA.

## CHALLENGE #1: TOO MUCH INFORMATION

Scientists found that in today's world, an average person receives as much as 74 GBs of information per day through media such as cell phones, computers, televisions, billboards, etc. The problem is that our brains can only handle about 0.51 GBs of information daily. The extra information we receive causes processing overload in our brains, leading to problems with sleep, anxiety, reduced focus and memory, and mental health problems (Blank, 2022; Nakshine et al., 2022)

What can we do to counter this information overload? First of all, we should try to filter the information we receive through the lens of the gospel. In Jesus's time, Jewish teachers were often debating with each other about which commandment of the over 600 commandments was the greatest. When Jesus was asked, he replied: "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength," and "you shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:30–31). This was the lens through which all of the other commandments should be viewed. This does not mean that the other commandments were no longer valid, but that they should be understood in light of the overarching principle of love for God and love for one's neighbor. Similarly, when navigating the information overload of our tech world, keep in mind that our main purpose here on earth is to show God's love and to preach the gospel. Use that as a filter through which to view everything else.

Secondly, rest is important—not only rest from our work on Sabbath, but also rest from technology, rest from too much information, rest that allows us to regularly reconnect with God and His Word. This means setting aside tech-free times throughout the day and throughout the week, setting screen time limits, and embracing boredom to allow our minds to relax. Above all, make restful and peaceful connection with God a priority.

## CHALLENGE #2: SHALLOW CONNECTIONS

Because so much information exists, we do not have time to engage with everything and everyone we find online. In addition, much of today's media is built around the idea of prioritizing quantity over quality, which leads to superficial engagement with people and ideas. Users are limited to typing 280-character posts on X and short videos on TikTok or Instagram are the most popular. We often only glance at something for a few seconds before scrolling on to the next thing. This superficiality limits our attention span and jeopardizes meaningful interactions and relationships.

Human beings long for meaningful connection. In the same way, true spirituality is not achieved by a catchy phrase or a flashy video, but takes time to

be nurtured and grown. Paul writes, “As you therefore have received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk in Him, rooted and built up in Him and established in the faith” (Col 2:6–7). Roots take time to grow, and true, meaningful relationships need the investment of time, patience, openness, and love, whether it is our relationship with God or with others. With this in mind, leaders should make time for those they are trying to reach and to show that they care by listening and praying with people. It is also important to be open and honest about one’s own walk of faith and to nurture meaningful spiritual connections.

### **CHALLENGE #3: CHANGE NEVER STOPS**

ChatGPT was launched in November of 2022. Less than three years later, artificial intelligence has permeated every website, smartphone, and business. We find ourselves in the middle of a historical technological revolution, similar to the invention of the printing press and the internet. It is natural for us to be hesitant and skeptical about new technologies, but the reality is that important technological advancements have had tremendous impacts in the world throughout history, and the church has both adapted to these advancements and benefitted from them. Gutenberg and the printing of the Bible, or the impact of C. S. Lewis’s radio broadcasts during World War II are just two examples. Change and innovation are important characteristics of our God-given ability to be creative and resourceful in developing new technologies.

Leaders are encouraged to take time to learn about innovations. Naturally, there will be both positive and negative effects that come with change, but change itself is not inherently bad. We must also keep in mind that technology should not be judged for how it is at the moment. There might be significant flaws or drawbacks in the present, but if it is a technology worth the investment, it will continue to receive updates, bug fixes, and be finetuned to produce better and more efficient results. Instead, we should look for enduring biblical principles that can ground us and help us navigate the change with faithfulness and integrity, always keeping in mind our greater purpose of sharing the truth of the gospel.

### **CHALLENGE #4: TOO MANY TOOLS**

There are an infinite number of tools available to us nowadays—a kind of resource overload. How should you know which app or which program is best for your ministry? I would encourage leaders to take the time to study and learn about which resources are available, and which ones could be most beneficial

for one's purposes. Be strategic and intentional about which digital tools to use and invest time in learning how to use them. These kinds of investments can make your work much more efficient and productive.

At the same time, remember that digital tools are just that—tools. They are not meant to think for you or interpret the Bible for you or do ministry for you. Each of us has a moral and ethical responsibility to handle God's Word with seriousness, honesty, and in good conscience. As Paul writes, "Be diligent to present yourself approved to God, a worker who does not need to be ashamed, rightly dividing the word of truth" (2 Tim 2:15; cf. English Standard Version: "rightly handling the word of truth"). The Bible calls us to test things for ourselves to see whether they are in accordance with Scripture, and we should teach our members to do the same. It is the responsibility of leaders in the church to keep such high standards as an example.

### **CHALLENGE #5: TRUTH UNDER ATTACK**

The term "post-truth" refers to "a situation in which people are more likely to accept an argument based on their emotions and beliefs, rather than one based on facts" (Cambridge University Press, n.d.). This word captures the essence of our technological age and explains the growing mistrust that people have for information found on social media and the internet. Simultaneously, people are relying more and more on artificial intelligence (AI) for information instead of doing their own research, which is a problem, because AI makes mistakes, provides false information, and gives biased answers. This point cannot be stressed enough: presenting content generated by AI as one's own work is dishonest, unethical, and falls under the category of plagiarism.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we need to be committed to the truth. Providing false information, misleading others, or distorting facts because we do not want to hurt the feelings of others is a sin. When we do so, we jeopardize our credibility to the world and misrepresent the character of God to others. Leaders should set an example for others and be totally committed to the truth by checking sources, double-checking information, and waiting for a more complete picture to emerge before formulating an opinion about something or someone. It is also imperative to be honest and transparent about one's use of AI. And finally, we should remember that the Bible alone is our foundation for truth. As Ellen G. White (1894) wrote in the *Signs of the Times*, "For God has a people who will preserve their fidelity to his truth, who will make the Bible, and the Bible alone, their rule of faith and doctrine" (par. 9).

## CHALLENGE #6: SCREENS OVER PEOPLE

Studies have shown a consistent rise in cyberbullying among children and teenagers over the past ten to fifteen years. “Unlike traditional bullying, cyberbullying can occur 24/7, follow teens into their homes and private spaces, spread to wide audiences instantly, and often allows perpetrators to remain anonymous” (Bright Path Behavioral Health, 2024, para. 2). Cyberbullying is known to lead to problems such as low self-esteem, suicidal ideation, anger, anti-social behavior, substance use, and more. These facts are mainly due to the nature of online activity: one can easily forget that on the other side of the screen there is a real human being reading our comments and texts. The distance created by our screens and the ability to remain anonymous leads people to do and say things that one would never do or say in person. This leads to dehumanization of the other, the inability to engage open and honestly with people who have different views than us, and to increased divisions among people.

It is important to remember that on the other side of the screen is a human being created in the image of God who deserves to be treated with dignity, respect, kindness, and empathy. As much as possible, we should make time to sit down with people in person, to listen to them, talk with them, find out how much we have in common. Part of the beauty of belonging to a church community is that we are all different, and yet we are all family, and we should treat each other as such, despite our differences.

## CHALLENGE #7: LIVING FOR LIKES

The last point to consider is the incentive for likes and algorithmic performance online. When a person curates their content or online image mainly with the goal of receiving more likes and shares, one might be tempted to misrepresent reality or avoid certain topics altogether because they do not perform well online. It might also lead to online celebrities with followers who are more interested in their religious idols than in the true message of the gospel.

Two points can be made here. First, precisely *because* of the rise super curated content, extremely edited photos, and overuse of CGI or AI-generated images, more and more young people are looking for authenticity and realness. This is a generation that has grown up with technology, and they can instantly notice an AI-generated image or when someone is performing for likes. Instead of a short, rehearsed, and edited interview, they would much rather listen to a three-hour unedited and unscripted podcast where the host and the guest talk openly about things in a relaxed setting. Similarly, we do not have to be afraid of being honest, sharing our struggles, and being a real human being. It is not eloquent sermons

or lofty speeches that reaches hearts, but the simplicity of the gospel and its power to change lives (cf. 1 Cor 2:1–13).

Second, just because something has been liked ten thousand times does not mean that it is good or true. Truth is not always likeable. In fact, truth is rarely popular. As Paul warned in 2 Timothy 4:3–4, “For the time will come when they will not endure sound doctrine, but according to their own desires, because they have itching ears, they will heap up for themselves teachers; and they will turn their ears away from the truth, and be turned aside to fables.” We must be committed to sharing the truth, whether it is popular or not. What we are seeking is not people’s likes, but their hearts for Jesus.

## CONCLUSION

As leaders and committed Seventh-day Adventists, we are called to prayerfully and faithfully discern how to navigate the digital age and to instruct our members to do the same. Technology, used in the right way and in the right measure, can be a blessing, both in our personal lives and in our ministries. Much more could be said about it, but the biblical and ethical principles discussed in this article are meant as a compass that can help guide our actions and decisions as we use technology for the honor and glory of God.

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# ONE MEAL IS NOT ENOUGH: WHY FAMILY WORSHIP IS KEY TO NURTURING THE FAMILY LIFE OF FAITH

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BY MARCOS PASEGGI

Imagine for a moment that one day you decide to go on a diet. *From now on, you tell yourself, I will fast every single Sabbath.* The following week you start your plan. You eat a balanced abundant diet for six days, and then fast on the Sabbath. The second week you do the same. And so forth and so on. What do you think might be the results? You might stop looking forward to the Sabbath hours, but otherwise, you will survive and perhaps even thrive by fasting one day a week.

Now imagine that you decide to implement a more drastic approach. *I'm going to stuff myself with food every Sabbath, you tell yourself, and then I'll fast for six days each week.* I probably don't need to tell you that such a course of action may lead to your eventual demise. No one can survive eating one day a week long-term.

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**Marcos Paseggi**, is senior news correspondent of Adventist Review and, together with his wife, Cintia, are passionate about transmitting the Adventist faith to their two teenage sons.

Many of us, however, try to follow a similar approach regarding spiritual nurture. We stuff ourselves each Sabbath, assuming the spiritual food will last until the next Sabbath we worship. Is it surprising, then, we don't get the spiritual results we are aiming for?

## FROM GENERATION TO GENERATION

The transmission of the knowledge of God and its implications for living on this earth were the center of family unit dynamics in ancient Israel. Teaching within a family setting was not theoretical but led to an experience of daily connection with God through praise and prayer. "From generation to generation we will proclaim your praise," wrote Asaph (Ps. 79:13, NIV).

This connection between older and younger generations was a natural part of regular interactions between parents and children. The teaching could sometimes take place in a formal setting but often would happen in the everyday environment of the home or everyday experiences. God-fearing parents were supposed to summon their children and initiate moments of worship and reflection. But parents also had to be ready to answer their children's questions whenever they arose, as in the case of the yearly Passover celebration: "When your son asks you in time to come, saying, 'What is this?' that you shall say to him, 'By strength of hand the Lord brought us out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage'" (Ex. 13:14).

Another important aspect of intergenerational teaching in Israel is that it did not happen in a vacuum. Teaching your children and grandchildren was part of a historical and theological continuum, a small but important part to play in God's plan of salvation. In the case of Israel, the passing of God's instructions to the next generation was a given, a key element for the ongoing survival of God's people. Its goal was straightforward: "So that you, your children, and your children's children may revere the Lord your God and follow, as long as you live, all His laws and commandments . . . to the end that you may long endure" (Deut. 6:2, Tanakh).<sup>1</sup> People can be motivated to obey out of fear or love. God is suggesting that teaching children His law and requirements might motivate everyone—both parents and children—to obey out of love.

At the same time, it is important to note that teaching one's children would be preceded by a series of presuppositions about God and "homework"—that parents would have previously learned and understood before even thinking of starting their children's "classes." This is not unique to Israel. These prerequisites are essential for anyone who wishes to engage in a formal or informal system of sharing God's knowledge to younger generations.

For a committed parent, any instance at home, out in nature, or in the marketplace can become an opportunity to impress a lesson on younger minds.

## KNOWING WHO GOD IS

After God outlined the goal and the results of paying heed to His teachings—“Obey, O Israel, willingly and faithfully, that it may go well with you and that you may increase greatly” (verse 3, Tanakh)—He pronounced the words that became the most well-known confession for Jewish people even today. “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one!” (verse 4). Or: “The Lord is our God, the Lord alone” (Tanakh).

This is not a discussion of Trinitarians versus anti-Trinitarians. The focus is on the uniqueness of God. Simply put, there is none like Him (see Jer. 10:6). “All the gods of the peoples are idols, but the Lord made the heavens” (Ps. 96:5). Or as a thankful Hannah acknowledged in 1 Samuel 2: “There is none besides You, nor is there any rock like our God” (verse 2).

Even before formal or informal teaching takes place, parents must grasp the biblically based idea of who God is. He is the Creator God, who not only created but has subsequently sustained and protected His people on their journey. “He alone is your God, the only one who is worthy of your praise, the one who has done these mighty miracles that you have seen with your own eyes” (Deut. 10:21, NLT).<sup>2</sup> Thus, any divine requirement, any commandment, any future transmission of those requirements and teachings to the next generation is grounded in the character of this God, who “gives to all life, breath, and all things” (Acts 17:25).

Acknowledging the uniqueness of God is a worthy first step. It is not, however, an end in and of itself. On the contrary, it should move the believer to engage with that unique God in a unique way.

## ENGAGING WITH GOD

Once the believer acknowledges the uniqueness of God, God Himself calls His people to love Him with all they are and have. “You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength” (Deut. 6:5). Unlike the Greek notion of gods well beyond the comprehension of human earthlings, forever detached, forever unreachable, God calls His people to engage with Him in a loving relationship framed by our way of thinking, feeling, and acting. There is no aspect in our lives—our thoughts, affections, hobbies, projects, our lifework—that is beyond the possibility of interacting with the Master of the universe.

That relationship is devoted, candid, and lifelong. It may go through rough patches, but even questions, doubts, or complaints to Him take place within an understanding that there is no plan B. There is no meaningful life without God.

This human-to-God relationship does not hesitate to question or ask for explanations, just as Abraham did when advocating for the citizens of Sodom. “Far be it from You to do such a thing as this, to slay the righteous with the wicked, so that the righteous should be as the wicked; far be it from You! Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right?” (Gen. 18:25).

It’s not wrong to question a perceived absence or remoteness of God, as David and others did. “My God, my God, why have You abandoned me; why so far from delivering me and from my anguished roaring?” (Ps. 22:2, Tanakh).

One of the tragedies of many young people growing up in Christian homes is perhaps that they are handed down a prepackaged bland model of a relationship with God. They never move past formulaic prayers and perfunctory worship. They never learn to wrestle with God, or to “chat,” demanding things from Him even when it results in ultimately surrendering to His will. In these circumstances, our children may mature spiritually aboveground but never develop roots. They may pay their respects, but never engage with their deepest thoughts, feelings, and actions. Eventually, this may result in withering and drifting away.

Through heartfelt discussions, open-heart testimonies, and Bible-based prayer, daily family worship can become an outstanding opportunity for teaching younger generations to love the Lord with all they are and have, and in everything they do.

## **ALWAYS A TEACHING MOMENT**

After God is acknowledged, God’s words dwell in the parents’ heart, and the family unit itself learns to engage with Him in a wholistic loving relationship, effective formal and informal teaching can take place.

According to the Bible, at this stage, two elements are key: diligence and repetition. “Take to heart these instructions with which I charge you this day. Impress them upon your children. Recite them when you stay at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you get up” (Deut. 6:6, 7, Tanakh).

Both elements are important. The sharing of the knowledge of God, His commandments, and requirements are not a onetime event, but a daily, planned, calculated endeavor. Random Bible teaching results in random, shallow Christians or worse. For a committed parent, any instance at home, out in nature, or in the marketplace can become an opportunity to impress a lesson on younger minds. These opportunities are not simple forums for parents to share their personal

opinions and preferences, but “classrooms” to recite and explain God’s words in terms children can understand and to lead by example.

Against this background, attending church on Sabbath can certainly be the cherry on top of a week of delightful spiritual meals. Regarding our spiritual life, one meal a week is not enough. Only the daily eating and drinking from the life-giving Source will do.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Texts credited to Tanakh are from *Tanakh: A New Translation of the Holy Scriptures According to the Traditional Hebrew Text*. Copyright © The Jewish Publication Society of America, 1985, 1999.
- <sup>2</sup> Scripture quotations marked NLT are taken from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 2015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

# A SPIRITUAL DIET: FINDING NOURISHMENT IN WORSHIP

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BY MERLE POIRIER

Taste and see that the Lord is good” (Ps. 34:8). Have you ever thought how the Lord might “taste”? By feasting on the Word of God, we come to know God better and, in the process, find ourselves filled and satisfied.

While all might agree that spending time with Jesus is important, many don’t. As Marcos Paseggi explained (see p. 18), while we wouldn’t think of eating only once a week, that’s exactly what we do with worship. When worship is neglected, the effect can be no different than skipping a meal. We become weak without food and drink. Without spiritual food, it’s the same.

Family worship is an important part of a “spiritual diet” whether we are single or a part of an intergenerational family. As we build the habit of daily spending time in worship, we also grow in our relationship with Jesus.

As we build the habit of daily spending time in worship, we also grow in our relationship with Jesus.

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**Merle Poirier**, recently retired from being the operations manager for Adventist Review Ministries at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists World Headquarters in Silver Spring, Maryland, USA.

Between 1999 and 2005 *Adventist Review* published a family worship column called Tuesday’s Child. The idea was to encourage family worship once a week. We’ve prepared a sample *week* of daily family worships—Sunday through Friday. On Sabbath we encourage attendance at a church near you. Six stories have been adapted from Tuesday’s Child. While geared toward families with children, we’re suggesting everyone can benefit from these lessons. Discussion questions are included for all age groups. Using all the elements provided should take about 10 minutes a day. Find the best time and try this spiritual meal plan. After this week, look for a devotional or select a Bible book to continue your own daily worship plan.

## DAY 1

### SCRIPTURE READING

“Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand” (Isa. 41:10).

### PRAYER

If alone, pray silently or aloud. If with others, select someone to pray.

### SONG

Choose a praise song, hymn, or children’s Sabbath School song. If you need a suggestion, try “Stand Like the Brave” (*The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, no. 610).<sup>1</sup>

### SARDINES AND SPIDERS<sup>2</sup>

*By Bonnie Walker*

Nine-year-old Jessica eyed a large hole that Flash, Grandpa’s dog, had dug under the foundation behind the barn.

*H’mmm, that’s a neat place to hide*, she thought, peering into the gloomy entrance.

Jessica was able to visit her grandparents often, but her cousins lived far away. She looked forward to the times they got together once or twice a year.

Today the old house fairly burst with cousins, aunts, and uncles. As the evening began to cool, the children begged, “Can we play ‘Sardines’ like last time, Grandpa?”

“Please,” pleaded Jessica. “Can Betty and I hide first?”

“Why not?” Grandpa agreed. “Come on, everyone,” he said to all the cousins, including their parents.

Everyone went where they wouldn't see where the two girls hid. After three minutes they'd come looking for them. If someone found them, they were to hide with them until everyone was in the same place—packed like sardines in a can. The last two to find the hiding spot would be “it” for the next game.

Jessica ran for the red barn. “Where are you going?” Betty asked.

“Wait and see,” laughed Jessica. She pushed aside the weeds at the back of the barn and scrambled down into the cool darkness under the building.

“You know the best places,” Betty whispered. “They won't find us here.”

Several times people came and searched, but they never found the children.

As their eyes grew accustomed to the dim light, Betty saw movement just above the opening. “Is that a humongous spider?” she asked.

The creature's shiny black body was about as big as a fat pea, and with its legs extended it would be about 1.5 inches across. She remembered a spider Grandpa had shown her once. “That's a black widow spider,” he had pointed out. “Give them their space. They're poisonous.”

Jessica knew that in “Sardines” people would have to squeeze past that spider. She grabbed a large tin can nearby. Then she crept forward and clapped it over the spider, holding it tightly.

After a long time the two girls heard the whole family approaching the barn. “We give up,” Grandpa called. “None of us can find you.”

“Down here,” they shouted.

Soon Grandpa rescued them. “You did the right thing about the spider, Jessica,” he said. “If someone had disturbed it, it may have bitten them.”

Jessica cringed. “I've had enough of Sardines and spiders to last me a long time,” she said.

### QUESTIONS/ACTIVITIES

- **With small children:** Talk about the spider and why one should be careful around them and other insects. In simple terms, tell how God protects us from danger. Pray that God will protect the family this day.
- **With middle schoolers or teenagers:** Talk about Jessica's courage. Would they be able to do the same? Where did she find her courage? How does protecting others give us more courage? Make a list of Bible characters with courage.
- **Adults:** What scripture can you read, or Bible story can you remember, in which God protected His people, and the people demonstrated courage? How can you practice courage today?

### CLOSING PRAYER

**DAY 2****SCRIPTURE READING**

“Love suffers long and is kind” (1 Cor. 13:4).

**PRAYER****SONG**

“Tis Love That Makes Us Happy” (*The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, no. 579).

**SHE WHO CAN DO NO WRONG<sup>3</sup>**

*By Bonnie Walker*

*Is that a diary under the edge of her bed?* Melissa wondered. She’d just brought some clean laundry to her younger sister Rita’s bedroom. Mom and Dad were at work, and Rita was spending the day with a friend. What a temptation!

Melissa had been jealous of her little sister all her life. Melissa was 15, and Rita, 10, but Melissa never forgot the day Rita came home from the hospital. Suddenly the spotlight was off her and focused on “she who can do no wrong.”

After Rita was born, it seemed Melissa was always competing for her parents’ approval.

*I wonder what she writes about me in that diary,* Melissa thought. *Maybe I’ll even find something bad she did that I could tell my parents about—then maybe they won’t think she’s such a Goody Two-shoes.* Melissa didn’t even consider whether looking into Rita’s diary was wrong.

Picking up the blue book, Melissa began turning the pages, searching for her name or some information she could use against her sister.

Melissa suddenly felt sick as she read page after page of things Rita had written. “I really wish I could be like Melissa,” Rita wrote. “She knows what to do all the time. She is so smart.” And further along: “Melissa is so pretty, and everyone likes her. I wish I were like Melissa.”

*She wants to be like me,* Melissa thought.

This was worse than Melissa could have imagined. Rita looked up to her. Suddenly Melissa realized she had spent 10 years finding fault in someone who loved her.

Quietly she put the book back under the edge of the bed and began to think about her relationship with Rita. She wanted to get to know her better. *But first she’d start with a note of apology.*

**QUESTIONS/ACTIVITIES**

- **With small children:** Find an object that must be treated gently and with permission. Talk about the fact that sometimes we must not touch and need

to obey. Jesus also has rules to keep us safe. We obey because we love Jesus.

- **With middle schoolers or teenagers:** Was it OK for Melissa to open and read the diary? Are there times reading something someone has kept private is OK to read or share? Read 2 Kings 22:8-10. How is this different from what Melissa did?
- **Adults:** Sometimes we judge people without knowing their true motives. Have you ever been jealous of someone? Send a note or email to someone today telling them how they have been a positive influence in your life.

## CLOSING PRAYER

### DAY 3

#### SCRIPTURE READING

“But as many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God” (John 1:12).

#### PRAYER

#### SONG

“When He Cometh” (*The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, no. 218).

#### THE FAMILY TREE<sup>4</sup>

*By Edna May Olsen*

Jay rushed back from the mailbox. “A letter from Grandma!” he shouted.

“Grandma sent a copy of our family tree,” Mother said. “She wants us to add you and your sister to it.”

“What’s a family tree?” asked Cheryl.

“Let me explain it,” said Mother as she spread the paper on the table.

“It’s a list of the members of a family comparing it to a tree with branches,” Mother said.

“Our family tree starts with Samuel Ward, up here.” She pointed to the top branches of what looked like a tree. “Now, here,” she said, pointing to the next branch, “it shows that Samuel married Anne Heywood, and they had five children. One of their children was Frances, my grandmother.”

“And my grandmother married Jacob Frost, and they had seven children.” She traced another branch of the tree. “One of those children was Elizabeth, my mother and your grandmother.”

Dad came to see what they were doing. “I can tell you about another family tree,” he said. He opened his Bible to Matthew 1:1 and read: “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the Son of David, the Son of Abraham.’”

“*Genealogy* is another word for ‘family tree,’” he explained. “In Bible times family background was important. That’s why the Bible lists the genealogy of Jesus, starting with Abraham, the father of Isaac, the father of Jacob, and all the way to Joseph, the earthly father of Jesus.” Then he turned to Luke 3. “Here is another family tree. This one goes back to Adam, ‘the son of God.’”

“But the best part,” smiled Mom, “is that those who love Jesus are part of God’s family. We’re part of His family tree!”

### QUESTIONS/ACTIVITIES

- **With small children:** Show them pictures of them, their parents, and their grandparents. Tell them how you are all family and love each other. There is someone else who is part of the family too. Jesus loves them even more! Sing “Happy, Happy Home,” being sure to end “With Jesus in the family, happy, happy home.”
- **With middle schoolers or teenagers:** Can they name their ancestors? How far back can they go? Why do they think Jesus has two family trees? Compare Matthew 1 and Luke 3. How are they different? [Answer: It was important to demonstrate that Jesus was descended from David. In Matthew 1 His family tree is through Joseph, and Luke 3 is thought to be His family tree through Mary. Jesus was a double Son of David!]
- **Adults:** Study the family trees in Matthew 1 and Luke 3. Where are the differences? What does it mean for you to be part of God’s family? What will you do today to make your Father proud?

### CLOSING PRAYER

## DAY 4

### SCRIPTURE READING

“Then the Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to tend and keep it” (Gen. 2:15).

### PRAYER

### SONG

“This Is My Father’s World” (*The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, no. 92).

## PHARAOH<sup>5</sup>

*By Bonnie Walker*

Mom always thinks she knows best,” grumbled Sierra, pushing the garage door open. “Pharaoh,” she called. *Why do we always have to lock that dog up when we go to school? He never gets lost.*

“Pharaoh,” she called again. But no dog came running. “Well, I’m just going to let him be. I can’t go chasing around the neighborhood looking for that dog,” Sierra said. She closed the door and ran to get her school bag. “Goodbye, Mom,” she called.

The school day passed quickly, and soon Sierra was home. *H’mmm, Pharaoh usually barks. Where can he be?* she wondered as she looked in the garage.

A note from Mom explained she had come home and found that Pharaoh was not in the garage, where she thought Sierra had put him. She had taken the car and was driving around the neighborhood.

“I’ve driven everywhere, and didn’t see any sign of him,” Mom said. “We may have to call the animal shelter.”

The next day Mother phoned the shelter. “We’re looking for our German shepherd. He’s been gone since yesterday.”

“We have a shepherd here. This one looks so sad, and he cried all night.”

Soon they were on their way to the shelter. They were greeted by Pharaoh’s happy barking. Pharaoh jumped into the front seat beside Mom. All the way home he whimpered and moaned. Sometimes he laid his muzzle on Mom’s shoulder.

Sierra sat in the back feeling guilty. *What a lot of expense and worry to everyone. Even Pharaoh. To think that a dog could show that much feeling!* She knew it was her fault, too. Leaning forward, Sierra patted Pharaoh’s head. “I’m sorry, boy,” she said.

## QUESTIONS/ACTIVITIES

- **With small children:** If you have a pet, practice holding or petting it. If no pet, try a stuffed animal. Talk about Jesus, who made the animals, and how we must be kind.
- **With middle schoolers or teenagers:** What different and sadder ending could this have had for Pharaoh? Why is it important to be kind to animals? Read the story of Balaam and the donkey (Num. 22:22-35).
- **Adults:** What can you do to help God’s creation? It might be supporting the environment, putting out water for bees, peanuts for squirrels, or picking up trash on the side of the road.

## CLOSING PRAYER

**DAY 5****SCRIPTURE READING**

“And the Lord restored Job’s losses when he prayed for his friends” (Job 42:10).

**PRAYER****SONG**

“I Need the Prayers” (*The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, no. 505).

**WHAT ABOUT ME?<sup>6</sup>**

*By Bonnie Walker*

It was Sabbath morning, and Ben’s family was rushing to get ready for church.

“We’re invited to lunch at the Clarks,” Mom said. “Pastor and Mrs. Lennox will be there too. I want you to bring play clothes for the afternoon.”

Just then Dad came into the living room. He didn’t always go to church, but today he was all dressed up.

After church Ben’s brother grabbed his arm. “Remember your manners at the Clarks,” he reminded him.

It was raining after lunch, so they went into the living room. Pastor Lennox told stories of when he was a young pastor. His stories were exciting. Then Ben’s dad began telling his story, including his struggle to stop smoking.

“Will you pray for me, Pastor Lennox?” asked Dad.

Pastor Lennox read Philippians 4:13, a promise that we can do all things through Christ who strengthens us. Then the group knelt in a circle and held hands. Pastor Lennox began to pray as if he were talking to his best friend. He asked God to be with Ben’s family and to give Ben’s dad strength to overcome.

While the pastor prayed, Ben remembered that he had a temper sometimes. Ben wanted God to bless him, too. During prayer Ben peeked at Pastor Lennox. He looked so happy and so sure that God would help his dad. “What about me?” Ben said out loud. His sister poked him for being rude.

Elder Lennox paused and opened his eyes. He looked right at Ben and smiled. Closing his eyes, he continued to pray. He then prayed for Ben byname. Ben never forgot that moment. It was just as if Ben was lifted right to God’s throne and God smiled at him.

**QUESTIONS/ACTIVITIES**

- **With small children:** Compare talking to Jesus with talking to our friends and family. Maybe call someone and talk with them on the phone. Then teach

them to talk to Jesus the same way. Help them to kneel, fold their hands, and close their eyes. Lead them in a simple prayer.

- **With middle schoolers or teenagers:** What does it mean to pray for others? Why did Ben feel good about the pastor praying for him? Create a list of people to pray for. Include these names in the closing prayer.
- **Adults:** Intercessory prayer is important. Create a list of others to pray for through the rest of the week. How do you feel when someone prays for you?

## CLOSING PRAYER

### DAY 6

#### SCRIPTURE READING

“He calms the storm, so that its waves are still” (Ps. 107:29).

#### PRAYER

#### SONG

“A Shelter in the Time of Storm” (*The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, no. 528).

#### IN THE MIDDLE OF A STORM<sup>7</sup>

*By Bonnie Walker*

It was a hot July afternoon in Alberta, Canada. Laurene could see her dad hammering shingles on the new shed for their cows.

Laurene was glad to be done picking berries. Helping her mom lift the last crate of strawberries onto the truck, she had an idea. “Mom,” Laurene begged, “may we have a sleepover tonight and invite Helen and Esther?”

“Pleeeeeease,” chimed in her sisters, Ruthi and Evie.

“I suppose,” said Mom, smiling at the three expectant faces. “You’ve all been a big help.”

After supper Uncle Art brought her two cousins over. They had fun setting up the trailer. On top of the trailer was a tentlike structure. Poles held up the roof, and the sides flopped out to form narrow beds on each side.

Finally the five girls and Laurene’s dog climbed through the tent flap. “Evie, you sleep on the floor with Mitzie,” Laurene said. “Helen can sleep with me on this side, and Ruthi and Esther can sleep on that side.”

*Splat, splatter, splat!* “Rain!” exclaimed Ruthi. The girls laughed and told stories until they were lulled to sleep by the wind and rain.

Suddenly the wind became gusty, moving the tent sides up and down. Laurene dreamed she was flying across the road. The wind woke Dad, who quickly hurried outside to move the big grain truck closer to the trailer to protect it from the wind.

Suddenly a mighty gust lifted the sides of the camper. Both sides folded in, dumping the four bigger girls on top of Evie and Mitzie. “Help!” screamed the girls.

Laurene knew she must unzip the flap. She fumbled for the zipper. Mitzie found the bottom of the zipper and nosed her way out, with the girls close behind. “Bend low,” Dad shouted. “Run for the cab of the truck.”

When all six people and the dog were safely in the truck, they watched lightning flash in the sky. A big sheet of plywood flew through the air and cut into the side of the garage as if it were slicing cheese. Shingles and more plywood blew past. Finally the storm subsided enough for the family to run for the house.

“Jesus sent the angels to help us,” said Ruthi.

### QUESTIONS/ACTIVITIES

- **With small children:** Go to a dark room and turn the lights on. Talk about how safe it feels when we can see. Then turn the lights off. Allow the darkness to have its effect and then turn the lights back on. Explain that Jesus is like the light. He’s with us even if it is dark, and keeps us safe.
- **With middle schoolers or teenagers:** Why are storms scary? Compare a storm to life and sin that has entered the world. Read how Jesus calms the storm (Luke 8:23-25). What keeps us safe during the storms of life?
- **Adults:** What storms have you encountered? Compare weather storms to our problems. What can we learn from coping with a storm that allows us to feel at peace when assaulted by life?

### CLOSING PRAYER

### NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Visit [sdahymnals.com](http://sdahymnals.com) for music and lyrics. Even young children can learn the refrains of some hymns.
- <sup>2</sup> *Adventist Review*, October 2003, p. 10.
- <sup>3</sup> *Adventist Review*, July 17, 2003, p. 29.
- <sup>4</sup> *Adventist Review*, July 10, 2003, p. 16.
- <sup>5</sup> *Adventist Review*, November 2002, p. 106.
- <sup>6</sup> *Adventist Review*, Aug. 21, 2003, p. 17.
- <sup>7</sup> *Adventist Review*, Aug. 15, 2002, p. 17.

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## 2025 FAMILY TOGETHERNESS WEEK OF PRAYER

# GOD'S GREAT GIFTS

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER, EDITORS  
KAREN HOLFORD, PRINCIPAL CONTRIBUTOR

Review and Herald® Publishing Association  
September, 2025, 50 pages

In the beginning, God's heart overflowed with love, and that love found its ultimate expression in three magnificent gifts that would crown His work of creation: marriage, family, and the Sabbath. While the first six days of creation week reveal God's power and artistry in forming the physical world, it is these three divine institutions that reveal the very heart of His character and His deepest desires for humanity.

Marriage, Family and the Sabbath, these three gifts—marriage, family, and Sabbath—stand as God's crowning acts of creation because they address humanity's deepest needs: companionship, belonging, and communion with the Creator. Together, they form a trinity of divine institutions that continue to bless and sustain us today, reminding us that we are fearfully and wonderfully made and loved by our Creator (Psalm 139:14).



Digital download at [family.adventist.org/familyworship](https://family.adventist.org/familyworship)

# 2024 FAMILY TOGETHERNESS WEEK OF PRAYER GROWING HEARTS OF WELCOME: UNDERSTANDING DIVERSE FAMILIES

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER, EDITORS  
KAREN HOLFORD, PRINCIPAL CONTRIBUTOR

Review and Herald® Publishing Association  
September, 2024, 70 pages

In cultures around the world there are families with unique challenges that make them different than what may be considered the norm, especially at a time when mass migration for various reasons—war, gang violence, political and religious repression, lack of opportunities, and poverty—is in process in many parts of our planet today. Also, there are families with members who are experiencing neurodiversity, and a host of other physical, emotional and psycho-social challenges, in addition to racial, ethnic, nationality and language differences. As Christians, it is essential to approach this reality with love, compassion, and understanding, guided by the teachings of Jesus Christ.



Digital download at [family.adventist.org/familyworship](https://family.adventist.org/familyworship)

## 2023 FAMILY TOGETHERNESS WEEK OF PRAYER

# KEYS TO HEALTHY MINDS: FLOURISHING FAMILIES

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER, EDITORS  
KAREN HOLFORD, PRINCIPAL CONTRIBUTOR

Review and Herald® Publishing Association  
July, 2023, 36 pages

The 2023 Family  
Togetherness Week  
of Prayer resource  
booklet: *Keys To  
Healthy Minds:  
Flourishing Families*,  
shares concepts to help

families and individuals flourish in their emotional health. Our prayer is that this will be a reality we can all experience as we allow God's peace, joy, hope, and healing to abide in our hearts.

Available in 12 languages: English, French, Italian, Latvian, Polish, Portuguese, Romanian, Russian, Sinhala, Spanish, Tamil and Ukrainian



Digital download at [family.adventist.org/familyworship](https://family.adventist.org/familyworship)

## 2022 FAMILY TOGETHERNESS WEEK OF PRAYER

# REBUILDING THE FAMILY ALTAR

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

Review and Herald® Publishing Association  
July, 2022, 42 pages



During the 2022 Family Togetherness Week of Prayer, our desire is for families to build or rebuild the altar of family worship in their homes. Family worship gives every family an opportunity to daily rebuild the altar of God.

Rebuilding the family altar means to establish a regular habit of setting aside time to worship God as a family. The most important thing is to make a commitment to doing something that intentionally points your family to God daily. Bring God into your big and small moments!

Digital download at [family.adventist.org/familyworship](https://family.adventist.org/familyworship)

## 2021 FAMILY TOGETHERNESS WEEK OF PRAYER

# LIVING FRUITFUL LOVE

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/familyworship](https://family.adventist.org/familyworship)



# CONNECTED: DEVOTIONAL READINGS FOR AN INTIMATE MARRIAGE

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).

Available at [adventistbookcenter.com](http://adventistbookcenter.com)

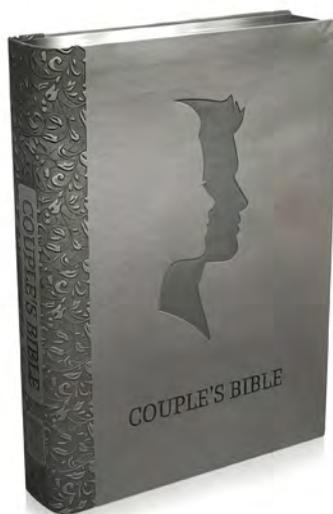
# COUPLE'S BIBLE

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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](http://www.safelizbibles.com)

# LEADERSHIP CERTIFICATION PROGRAM 2.0

GENERAL CONFERENCE ADVENTIST FAMILY MINISTRIES



The Family Ministries Leadership Certification Program 2.0 offers a transformative 50-hour training designed to cultivate a new generation of family life educators around the world. This comprehensive program responds to the urgent need for skilled facilitators who can address the pressing issues facing families today. With marriage rates declining globally

and issues such as out-of-wedlock births, high divorce rates, and alternative living arrangements on the rise, this leadership training aims to strengthen the family unit, which remains the cornerstone of societal health and well-being.

Please contact the department of Adventist Family Ministries via email at [family@gc.adventist.org](mailto:family@gc.adventist.org) for more information.

# REAL FAMILY TALK

WITH WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

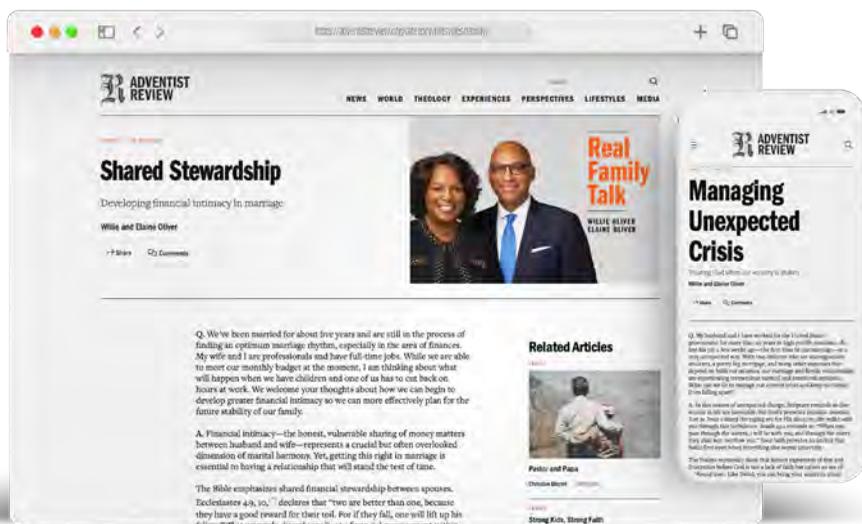


Through engaging, informative, and spiritual discussions about issues facing today's families, *Real Family Talk* seeks to strengthen families and inspire hope. In each edition, the Olivers draw from their pastoral, educational, and counseling experience to navigate discussions about family life, approaching each topic with practical solutions and sound biblical principles.

Watch now on [youtube.com/@realfamilytalkTV](https://www.youtube.com/@realfamilytalkTV), and [www.hopetv.org/realfamilytalk](http://www.hopetv.org/realfamilytalk).

# REAL FAMILY TALK: ADVENTIST REVIEW ONLINE COLUMN

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER



This Monthly Column on Adventist Review ([adventistreview.org](http://adventistreview.org)) offers valuable insights and practical advice on family and relationship issues, authored by Willie and Elaine Oliver, directors of Adventist Family Ministries at the Seventh-day Adventist Church World Headquarters. Drawing from their extensive experience in theology, family sociology and marriage and family therapy, the Olivers provide biblically rooted guidance tailored to address a wide range of concerns faced by readers. Since 2017, they have contributed dozens of columns, offering thoughtful responses to questions about marriage, parenting, and relationship challenges.

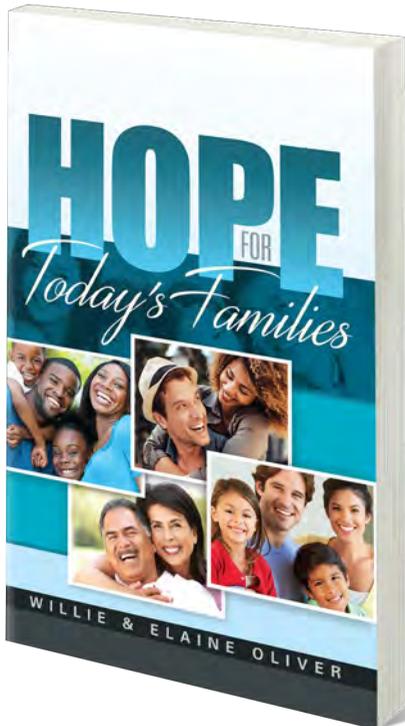
Topics covered include “*God Loves the Word ‘Impossible’*”, “*Don’t Go to Bed Angry?*”, “*When Is the Right Time?*”, and “*Managing Wedding Preparation Stress*”; each column is designed to illuminate real-life issues and offer usable advice grounded in biblical principles.

# HOPE FOR TODAY'S FAMILIES

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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.

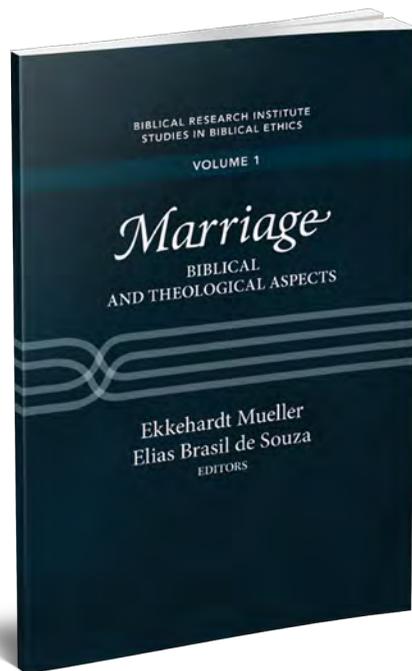
Available in many languages at Adventist Book Centers worldwide or through your local publishing house.

# MARRIAGE: BIBLICAL AND THEOLOGICAL ASPECTS, VOL. 1

EKKEHARDT MUELLER AND ELIAS BRASIL DE SOUZA, EDITORS

Biblical Research Institute. Review and Herald Publishing, 2015  
304 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.

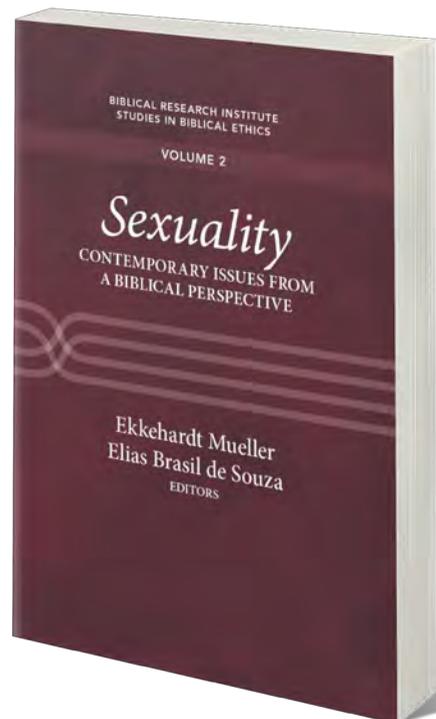


# SEXUALITY: CONTEMPORARY ISSUES FROM A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE, VOL. 2

EKKEHARDT MUELLER AND ELIAS BRASIL DE SOUZA, EDITORS

Biblical Research Institute, 2022  
643 pages

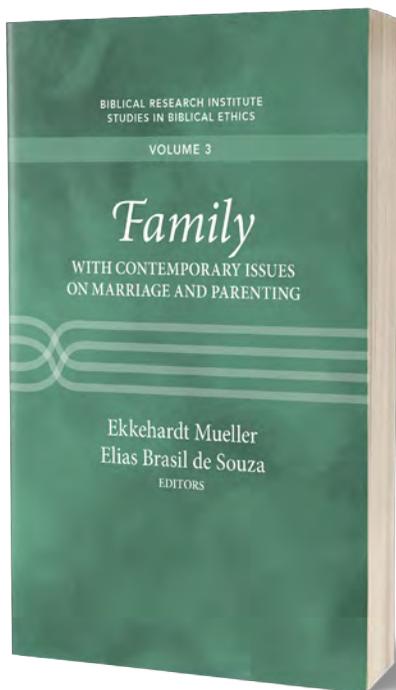
*Sexuality: Contemporary Issues from a Biblical Perspective* is the sequel to *Marriage: Biblical and Theological Aspects*. Focusing on sexuality, this volume addresses several topics of contemporary relevance to individual Christians and church communities around the world. It wrestles with matters directly or indirectly related to marriage, such as cohabitation and polygamy. It also examines topics not necessarily connected to marriage, such as sexual addiction, cybersex, robotic sex, rape, female genital mutilation, child sexual abuse, and queer theology and practice.



# FAMILY: WITH CONTEMPORARY ISSUES ON MARRIAGE AND PARENTING, VOL. 3

EKKEHARDT MUELLER AND ELIAS BRASIL DE SOUZA, EDITORS

Biblical Research Institute. Review and Herald Publishing, 2023  
689 pages



*Family: Contemporary Issues on Marriage and Parenting* concludes the three-volume series on marriage and sexuality published by the Biblical Research Institute. This volume addresses topics and issues relevant to the family from the perspective of a biblical theology of marriage as established at creation. A major goal of this volume is to bring biblical clarity to the challenging topics its authors have addressed and thus help readers face challenges regarding family and sexuality based on the authority of God's Word.

# ARMOR OF GOD

GENERAL CONFERENCE CHILDREN'S MINISTRIES



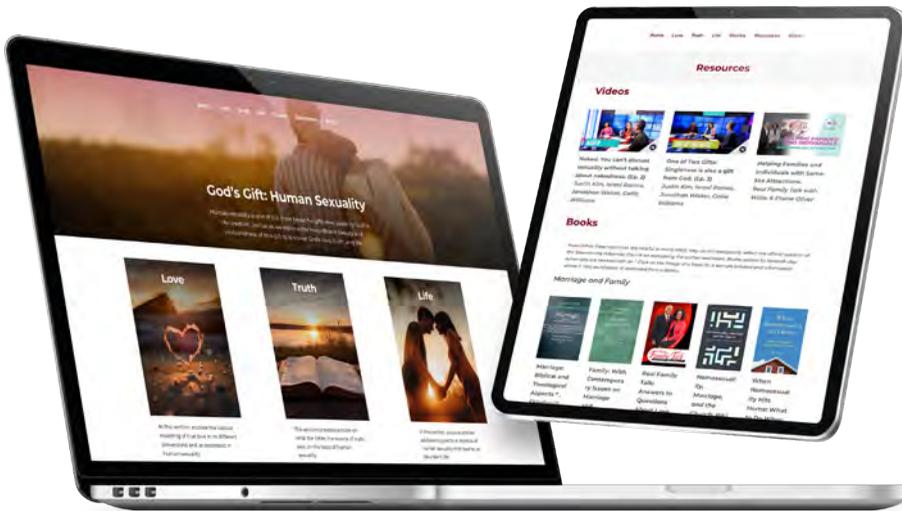
Get ready to suit up! The Armor of God is an interactive app for children that helps them learn the principles taught in Ephesians 6:10-20.

In a region where the apostle Paul possibly wrote the book of Ephesians, twins Anya and Aiden begin an adventure with their parents. Here is where they learn that the Armor of God isn't a military command but a call to be principled and just. Each piece of armor has a story. With each story unlock games focused on the principle of each piece of armor.

Search for **Armor of God Kids App** on the Apple Appstore or Google Play Store

# HUMAN SEXUALITY.ORG

GENERAL CONFERENCE OF SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS



Human sexuality is one of the most beautiful gifts ever given by God to His creation. Join us as we explore the magnificent beauty and profoundness of this gift to discover God's love, truth, and life.

An official Seventh-day Adventist website providing practical, biblically-based articles, stories, videos, and more.

Visit [www.humansexuality.org](http://www.humansexuality.org)

# APPENDIX A FAMILY MINISTRIES IMPLEMENTATION

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Note: Some of the recommendations listed in these forms may need to be adapted and modified to the specific needs and laws where you live.

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## **Downloadable Materials**

To download the Appendix A surveys and forms please visit our website: [family.adventist.org/2026RB](http://family.adventist.org/2026RB)

# A FAMILY MINISTRIES POLICY AND PURPOSE STATEMENT

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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

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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?

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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

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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.

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Reprinted from Family Ministries Handbook: The complete how-to guide for local church leaders. (2003). Lincoln, NE: AdventSource. Used with permission

# THE TEN COMMANDMENTS OF PRESENTATIONS

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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.

# 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="checkbox"/> Preparation for marriage   | <input type="checkbox"/> Worship and devotional life  |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Family finance             | <input type="checkbox"/> Communication                |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Discipline in the home     | <input type="checkbox"/> Single adult living          |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Parenting teenagers        | <input type="checkbox"/> Improving self-worth         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Preparation for childbirth | <input type="checkbox"/> Resolving anger and conflict |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Divorce recovery           | <input type="checkbox"/> Television and media         |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Single parenting           | <input type="checkbox"/> Preparation for retirement   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Sexuality                  | <input type="checkbox"/> Chemical dependency issues   |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Enriching your marriage    | <input type="checkbox"/> Blended families             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Grief recovery             | <input type="checkbox"/> Death and dying              |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Understanding temperaments | <input type="checkbox"/> Coping with widowhood        |
| <input type="checkbox"/> 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="checkbox"/>						
Afternoon	<input type="checkbox"/>						
Evening	<input type="checkbox"/>						

# 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.)

- How to Handle Conflict
- Communication in Marriage
- Marriage Enrichment or Encounter
- Understanding Children
- Self-Esteem
- Parenting Skills
- Dealing with Teenagers
- Childbirth Preparation Class
- Other (Please specify) .....
- Divorce Recovery
- Stress Management
- Overcoming Loneliness Weekend
- Family Finances
- Grief Recovery
- Time Management and Life Priorities
- Planning Retirement

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="checkbox"/>						
Afternoon	<input type="checkbox"/>						
Evening	<input type="checkbox"/>						

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:

- Never married
- Married
- Separated
- Divorced
- Widowed
- 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.

- |                           |                          |                         |                         |                         |
|---------------------------|--------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|-------------------------|
| <input type="radio"/> 1   | <input type="radio"/> 2  | <input type="radio"/> 3 | <input type="radio"/> 4 | <input type="radio"/> 5 |
| Generally<br>Dissatisfied | Somewhat<br>Dissatisfied | Somewhat<br>Satisfied   | Generally<br>Satisfied  | Very<br>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

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The following *Voted Statements* are official positions of the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

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# AFFIRMATION OF MARRIAGE

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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.

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This statement was approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee (ADCOM) on April 23, 1996.

# AN AFFIRMATION OF GOD'S GIFT OF SEXUALITY

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Human beings are created in the image of a relational God and designed to enjoy an intimate relationship with their Creator and one another (Gen. 1:26, 27; Matt. 22:37-39; John 17:3; 1 John 4:11, 12). From the beginning, God fashioned humankind in two genders, male and female (Gen. 1:27). Magnificent expressions of His creative genius, the man and woman evoked His deepest satisfaction and passionate acclaim. Both were sexual creatures by their very nature, and God intended that they would rejoice in their maleness or femaleness. His creative work was “very good” (Gen. 1:31)! There was nothing incomplete or shameful about what He had made. Maleness and femaleness afford a primary basis for human beings to define their personhood and their relationships with God and each other (Ps. 8:3-6; 100:3; Is. 43:1, 3, 4; Jer. 1:5; 1 John 4:7, 8).

God created male and female to complement one another (Gen. 2:18, 20-22). In Eden, they shared equally God’s image and blessing. Together they were given responsibility for dominion over and care for the earth, and for procreation (Gen. 1:26-28). They were created with an intrinsic longing and desire for one another, physically, sexually, emotionally, psychologically, and spiritually (Gen. 2:23-25; Prov. 5:18, 19; Song of Sol. 2:16, 17; 4:9). With the creation of the sexes, each came to understand self and other (Gen. 2:23). In the moment they met for the first time, the yearning of Adam’s heart and soul for partnership and intimate communion

burst forth into joyous acclamation: “This is now bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh” (Gen. 2:23). Immediately they recognized each other as companions, counterparts, persons capable of meeting one another’s needs. Each saw the other as one corresponding to their being, one equal but different, someone to love who would love in return (Gen. 2:18, 20b-23).

The Bible presents a wholistic view of human beings with no dichotomy between body and spirit (Gen. 2:27; Ps. 63:1; 84:1, 2, 1 Thess. 5:23). In both the Old and New Testaments, sexuality is clearly regarded as a valuable gift from God, to be received with gratitude and freely enjoyed within the marriage relationship (Gen. 1:24, 25; Prov. 5:15-19; Song of Sol. 2:16; 4:16-5:1; 1 Cor. 7:1-5). Sexual expression within marriage is portrayed as wholesome and honorable (Ps. 139:13-16; Song of Sol. 4:10-16; 7:1-9; 1 Cor. 6:19). The Scripture’s positive attitude towards human sexuality is further confirmed by the use of the imagery of marital intimacy to describe God’s relationship with His people (Is. 54:5; 62:4,5; Jer. 3:14; Ez. 16:8; Hos. 2:19, 20; Rev. 19:6-9).

In marriage, God intended that one man and one woman would be joined together for life by covenant promise (Gen. 2:24,25; Song of Sol. 2:16; Mal. 2:13, 14; Matt. 19:4-6). This marriage relationship is described as one flesh (Gen. 2:24; Matt. 19:5) and presumes a sexual union (1 Cor. 7:1-6). The Scripture affirms sexual pleasure between husband and wife for its unitive purposes, apart from procreation. God intends for the sexual relationship to bond husband and wife together as they bring to one another companionship, emotional support, spiritual fulfillment, joy and sexual pleasure (Gen. 2:24, 25; Prov. 5:15-19; Eccl. 9:9; Song of Sol. 4:16-5:1; Eph. 5:21-33). A loving marriage and sexual union was also God’s chosen setting for procreation (Gen. 1:28; 4:1). Such a relationship provides the most secure environment for the care and nurture of children (Eph. 6:4).

Sexual intimacy finds its deepest meaning in husband-wife relationships characterized by love, closeness, mutuality and commitment. In God’s design, the sexual relationship is one of respect, mutual desire and consent and loving fulfillment of one another’s needs (Prov. 5:15-23; Song of Sol. 2:16-17; 4:16-5:1; 7:8-10; Mal. 2:15; 1 Cor. 7:3-5). In the context of their commitment to Christ and one another, couples make decision together about their sexual experience. The biblical principles of mutual submission (Eph. 5:21) and thoughtful care for one another’s needs and desires (Phil. 2:4) help couples to reach decisions which are satisfying to both husband and wife. Sexual practice that harms or threatens the physical, emotional or spiritual health and well-being of one or both partners violates the Scripture’s elevated view of persons and its call to care for the body as God’s handiwork and dwelling place (Gen. 2:25; Ps. 63:1; 139:13-16; 1 Cor 3:16-17).

As God surveyed His creation, He observed, “It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him” (Gen. 2:18). Though the creation story establishes marriage as God’s primary answer to aloneness (Gen. 2:24), in the broader sense aloneness is dispelled through connection with God and fellow human beings in mutually satisfying relationships (Rom. 14:7). All human beings were created for life in community, where persons whose differences would otherwise separate them are bound together as one in Jesus Christ (Rom. 12:4-5; 1 Cor. 12:12, 13; Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:14-22; 4:1-6). While some, by choice or circumstance, are single, they may experience wholeness as individuals, connect with others through family and friends, and bring glory to God as single men and women (Matt. 19:12; 1 Cor. 7:7, 8). Sexual intimacy is reserved for a husband and wife whose relationship is protected by covenant promise (Prov. 5:15-19; Song of Sol. 2:6,7; 3:5; 8:3,4; 4:12; 8:8-10; Hos. 3:3).

As a result of sin, sexuality has been devalued and, in many cases, wrenched apart from intimacy, love and covenant relationship. Because sexuality is such a powerful vehicle for connectedness, and because it is such an intrinsic part of the wholistic nature of human beings, whenever it is damaged, debased, abused, misused, or counterfeited, the repercussions have an enormous impact on the persons and their relationships. Scripture cries out against such travesty. It calls Christians to flee from sexual immorality and, by God’s grace, to stretch toward the full restoration of His original design for sexuality (Prov. 5:15-20; Hos. 2:2; 6:1-3; 1 Cor. 6:15-20; Gal. 5:16-26; Eph. 5:3-10; 21-33; Col. 3:1-19; 1 Thess. 5:23, 24).

While condemning as sin our selfish failures to reflect God-given norms for sexuality, Scripture demonstrates Jesus’ readiness to forgive those who repent of sexual sins. God’s renewing power and love have enabled many to experience a transformation from sexual brokenness to healing, wholeness, and peace (Luke 7:36-50; John 4:4-28; 8:1-11).

# FUNDAMENTAL BELIEF ON MARRIAGE AND THE FAMILY

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Marriage was divinely established in Eden and affirmed by Jesus to be a lifelong union between a man and a woman in loving companionship. For the Christian a marriage commitment is to God as well as to the spouse, and should be entered into only between a man and a woman who share a common faith. Mutual love, honor, respect, and responsibility are the fabric of this relationship, which is to reflect the love, sanctity, closeness, and permanence of the relationship between Christ and His church. Regarding divorce, Jesus taught that the person who divorces a spouse, except for fornication, and marries another, commits adultery. Although some family relationships may fall short of the ideal, a man and a woman who fully commit themselves to each other in Christ through marriage 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. Increasing family closeness is one of the earmarks of the final gospel message. 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, tender, and caring guide who wants them to become members of His body, the family of God which embraces both single and married persons. (Gen 2:18-25; Exod 20:12; Deut 6:5-9; Prov 22:6; Mal 4:5, 6; Matt 5:31, 32; 19:3-9, 12; Mark 10:11, 12; John 2:1-11; 1 Cor 7:7, 10, 11; 2 Cor 6:14; Eph 5:21-33; 6:1-4.)

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Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists, #23, Marriage and the Family. July 6, 2015, General Conference Session (GCC 15-1046)

# GUIDELINES FOR THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH IN RESPONDING TO CHANGING CULTURAL ATTITUDES REGARDING HOMOSEXUAL AND OTHER ALTERNATIVE SEXUAL PRACTICES

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## **THE DIVINE IDEAL OF SEXUALITY AND MARRIAGE**

Issues related to human sexuality and marriage can be seen in their true light as they are viewed against the background of the divine ideal for humanity. God’s creative activity culminated in making humankind in His own image as male and female and instituting marriage. Marriage as a wonderful divine gift to humanity is a covenant-based union of the two genders physically, emotionally, and spiritually, referred to in Scripture as “one flesh.” Jesus Christ affirmed

marriage to be both monogamous and heterosexual, a lifelong union of loving companionship between a man and a woman. In addition, throughout Scripture such heterosexual union in marriage is elevated as a symbol of the bond between Deity and humanity.

The harmonious relation 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. The Creator intended married sexuality not only to serve a unitive purpose but also to provide joy, pleasure, and physical completeness. At the same time, 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, a living embodiment of their oneness, thrives in the atmosphere of married love and unity and has the benefit of a relationship with each of the natural parents.

While 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 intimate sexual expression,<sup>1</sup> singleness and the friendship of singles are within the divine design as well. Scripture, however, places a distinction between acceptable conduct in friendship relations and sexual conduct in marriage.

Unfortunately, human sexuality and marriage have been corrupted by sin. Therefore, Scripture does not focus only on the positive aspects of human sexuality but also on wrong expressions of sexuality and their negative impact on people and society. It warns humans of destructive sexual behaviors such as fornication, adultery, homosexual intimacies, incest, and polygamy, (e.g., Matt 19:1-12; 1 Cor 5:1-13; 6:9-20; 7:10-16, 39; Heb 13:4; Rev 22:14, 15) and calls them to do what is good, healthy, and beneficial.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church adheres without reservation to the divine ideal of pure, honorable, and loving sexual relations within heterosexual marriage, believing that any lowering of this high view is detrimental to humanity. It also believes that the ideals of purity and beauty of marriage as designed by God need to be emphasized. Through the redemptive work of Christ, the original purpose of marriage may be recovered, and the delightful and wholesome experience of matrimony may be realized by a man and a woman who join their lives in a lifelong marriage covenant.

## **THE CHURCH AND SOCIETY**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church believes that it has been called into existence by God to proclaim the everlasting gospel to the entire world, and to invite persons everywhere to be ready for the second coming of Jesus. The

Church pursues God’s mission around the globe, currently teaching, preaching, caring, and serving in more than 200 nations. The Seventh-day Adventist Church has no creedal statement: it believes that its teachings rest on the authority of the Bible alone. It summarizes those beliefs, however, in a Statement of Fundamental Beliefs, currently 28 in number. Central to the Church’s understanding of God’s plan for ordering human society is its teaching on “Marriage and the Family.”<sup>2</sup>

Because Seventh-day Adventists live, work, and minister in every part of the world, individual Seventh-day Adventists and the institutions by which the Church pursues God’s mission relate to and interact with all levels of human government. The Bible instructs Christians to be obedient to the laws enacted by civil government, and wherever morally possible, Seventh-day Adventist members and Church organizations will seek to be subject to the governing authorities, even as they seek counsel about how to respond when the claims of government conflict with the truths of the Bible and the Fundamental Beliefs of the Church.

## **THE CHURCH’S RELATIONSHIP TO CIVIL LEGISLATION ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY AND ALTERNATIVE SEXUAL BEHAVIORS**

The Word of God is replete with instruction and illustration bearing on the believer’s relationship to the authority and jurisdiction of civil government. Because the Seventh-day Adventist Church values the entirety of the Word of God as its ultimate authority for truth, doctrine, and way of life, it always seeks to reflect in its teaching and practice the full message of Scripture regarding appropriate interaction with civil government. To that end, the Church periodically offers counsel to individuals, leaders, and church institutions when the claims of civil government and the teachings of the Bible appear to be in conflict. This document focuses on the growing divide between the enactments of some civil governments and the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church about acceptable sexual behaviors.

The following principles, though not comprehensive, undergird the Church’s consistent application of biblical truths to the societies and cultures in which it operates and the governments to which it responds. These principles will be especially important in framing, for a Church ministry or organization, an appropriate response to any level of civil government that may attempt to impose on the Church its perceptions of legally and morally acceptable sexual practices.

- 1. All human governments exist through the provision and allowance of God.** The apostle Paul clearly instructs both individual Christians and the

Church to place themselves willingly in submission to human governments that have been ordained by God to preserve God-given liberties, promote justice, preserve social order, and care for the disadvantaged (see Rom 13:1-3). Insofar as they act in concert with the values and principles articulated in the Word of God, civil governments deserve the respect and obedience of individual believers and the corporate Church. Wherever possible, individual Seventh-day Adventists and Church organizations in a given state or nation will seek by their behavior and statements to be understood as loyal citizens, participating in the rights and responsibilities of citizenship. Additionally, believers are instructed to pray for those in civil authority (1 Tim 2:1, 2) so that believers may practice the virtues of God's kingdom.

2. **Although the authority of human government is derived from the authority of God, the claims and jurisdictions of human governments are never ultimately definitive for either individual believers or the Church. Both individual believers and the Church owe supreme allegiance to God Himself.** On those occasions when the claims of civil government directly conflict with and contradict the teaching of the Word of God as understood by the Seventh-day Adventist Church, both the Church and its members are bound by that same Word of God to obey its precepts rather than those of human government (Acts 5:29). This expression of a higher allegiance is specific only to the claim of government that is in contradiction to the Word of God, and does not otherwise diminish or remove the obligation of either the Church or individual believers to live in submission to civil authority on other matters.
3. **Because individual believers and the organized Church enjoy the rights and liberties given them by God and ratified by civil government, they may fully participate in the processes by which societies organize social life, provide for public and electoral order, and structure civil relationships.** This may include a clear articulation of the Church's beliefs in such things as (1) the preservation of liberty of conscience; (2) the protection of the weak and disadvantaged; (3) the responsibility of the state to promote justice and human rights; (4) the divinely ordained state of marriage between one man and one woman and the family that results from this union; and (5) the values of God-given health principles and practices in building up the social and economic welfare of the state. Neither individual Seventh-day Adventists nor the congregations, institutions, and entities through which they engage in their God-given mission should surrender their privileges and rights as a result of opposition to their allegiance to biblical teaching. With its long history of defending religious liberty and freedom of worship around

the globe, the Seventh-day Adventist Church defends the rights of all persons, of whatever faith, to follow the dictates of their conscience and to engage in the religious practices to which that faith compels them.

- 4. Because the Seventh-day Adventist Church believes and practices a wholistic understanding of the gospel of Jesus Christ, its evangelistic, educational, publishing, medical, and other ministry organizations are integral and indivisible expressions of its fulfillment of the commission given by Jesus, “Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you” (Matt 28:19, 20, ESV).** While Seventh-day Adventist congregations, publishing and media ministries, educational institutions, hospitals and medical centers, and ministry organizations appear to share certain similarities with other social and cultural institutions, they have historically been organized and continue to be organized on a faith and missional basis. They exist for the express purpose of communicating the saving knowledge of Jesus Christ through their multiform methods and initiatives, and to advance the mission of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, and should enjoy all the privileges and liberties accorded to the religious organization of which they are essential parts. The Seventh-day Adventist Church vigorously asserts and defends the nonseparability of its various forms of mission, and urges all civil governments to accord to each of its organizations and entities the rights of conscience and freedom of religious practice asserted in the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights and guaranteed in the constitutions of most world states.
- 5. In their interface with civil governments and societies, both the Church and individual Seventh-day Adventists must conduct themselves as representatives of the kingdom of Christ, exhibiting His characteristics of love, humility, honesty, reconciliation, and commitment to the truths of the Word of God.** Each human being, of whatever gender, race, nationality, social class, faith, or sexual orientation, deserves to be treated with respect and dignity by the Seventh-day Adventist Church and the entities and organizations through which it pursues God’s mission. Because it defines itself as the body of Christ, who “died for us” “while we were yet sinners” (Rom 5:8), the Church holds itself to the highest standards of speech and conduct toward all human beings. Recognizing that God is the ultimate Judge of all persons, the Church believes in the opportunity of all persons to be included in the kingdom of heaven as they acknowledge and forsake their sinfulness, confess Christ as Lord, accept His righteousness in place of

their own, seek to obey His commandments, and live His life of service. The Church affirms its right to describe some behaviors, ways of living, and the organizations that promote them as contrary to the Word of God. The Church is also responsible, however, to differentiate clearly between its critique of those beliefs and behaviors, and its respect for the persons expressing those beliefs and behaviors. The Church does not condone and will not allow its public statements on matters of social concern to be characterized as contempt or verbal humiliation of those with whom it disagrees. In exercising its freedoms, the Church's public speech must exhibit the grace always seen in Jesus. All Seventh-day Adventist entities and organizations, as well as individual members of the Church, are urged to express their respect for individuals or groups of persons with whose behavior and opinions they are compelled to disagree because of allegiance to the Word of God. The Church earns the credibility to participate in difficult social and national issues by its clear identification of itself as a redemptive entity.

In light of the above principles derived from the Word of God, the Seventh-day Adventist Church seeks to offer counsel to congregations, church organizations and entities, and those who lead church organizations and entities. The complex issues surrounding civil governments' responses to the reality of homosexuality and alternative sexual practices in contemporary society underscore the importance of this counsel.

## **THE CHALLENGES OF STATE LEGISLATION**

In a growing number of nations, governments enact special legislative or judicial protection to prevent what they consider discriminatory behavior. Those protections sometimes appear to impair the religious-freedom rights of Seventh-day Adventist pastors, leaders, and Church organizations to employ persons, perform weddings, offer employment benefits, publish missional material, make public statements, and provide education or educational housing on the basis of the Seventh-day Adventist teaching about the sinfulness of sexual behaviors prohibited by Scripture.

Conversely, in a number of nations, homosexual or alternative sexual practices result in harsh penalties imposed by law. While Seventh-day Adventist institutions and members may appropriately advocate for preserving the unique and God-given institution of heterosexual marriage in their societies and legal codes, it is the position of the Church to treat those practicing homosexual or alternative sexual behaviors with the redemptive love taught and lived by Jesus.

## **THE MORAL AND RELIGIOUS FREEDOMS OF THE CHURCH**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church will encourage all its congregations, employees, ministry leaders, organizations, and entities to uphold church teachings and faith-based practices in Church membership, employment, education, and marriage ceremonies, including officiating at weddings. These teachings and faith-based practices, built upon the Bible's instructions about human sexuality, are equally applicable to heterosexual and homosexual relationships. It is inconsistent with the Church's understanding of scriptural teaching to admit into or maintain in membership persons practicing sexual behaviors incompatible with biblical teachings. Neither is it acceptable for Adventist pastors or churches to provide wedding services or facilities for same-sex couples.

In upholding these Scriptural standards, the Church relies upon the faith-based exemptions usually and customarily extended by civil government to religious organizations and their affiliated ministries to organize themselves according to their understanding of moral truth. The Church will also attempt to provide legal counsel and resources to Church leaders, organizations, and entities so that they operate in harmony with its biblical understanding of human sexuality.

Congregational leaders, Church employees, ministry leaders, and institutions are advised to review carefully the Church's existing policies with regard to membership, employment, and education to ensure that local practices are in harmony with the Church's expressed teachings about sexual behavior. Consistent expression and application of organizational policies and teachings regarding such behavior will be a key feature of maintaining the faith-based exemptions customarily allowed by civil governments.

## **FAITH-BASED DECISION MAKING IN EMPLOYMENT AND ENROLLMENT**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church asserts and reserves the right for its entities to employ individuals according to Church teaching about sexual behaviors compatible with the teaching of Scripture as understood by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. While each institution and ministry operates in its own society and legal climate, each also expresses the worldwide belief system and teachings of the global Church. The Church maintains the right of these ministries and institutions to make decisions based on the teaching of Scripture and will provide legal review of relevant law and ordinances.

Wherever possible and feasible, the Church will continue to advocate, both legislatively and in courts of law, for faith-based preferential hiring and enrollment practices for itself and its ministries.

## THE CHURCH AND PUBLIC SPEECH

The Church asserts the right to express its commitment to biblical truth through the communication it makes available to its members and to various publics, as well as to defend the free-speech rights of its employees to express the Church's teaching about sexual behavior in public environments, including worship services, evangelistic meetings, educational classrooms, and public forums. Church leaders accept the responsibility to keep themselves and Church employees informed about government regulations regarding acceptable speech, and to invite periodic legal review of how those regulations should affect the Church's mission. Those responsible for the Church's official communication and those who preach and teach should emphasize the importance of surrendering all behavior, including sexual behavior, to the transforming power of Jesus Christ. The standard for both published material and public statements about sexual behaviors must be that they are widely understood as both "clear and respectful," expressing biblical truth with the kindness of Jesus Himself.

## THE CHURCH AND PUBLIC SPEECH

To achieve a consistent application of a "clear and respectful" standard in its ministries, the Church urges all its ministries, including pastoral and evangelistic ministries, educational ministries, publishing and media ministries, and health and medical ministries, among others, periodically to provide training and counsel to employees who interface with the public through media and public presentations. This training should include a review of current national or community law pertaining to public speech about sexual behaviors, and examples of appropriate ways to communicate the Church's beliefs and teachings.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See the Seventh-day Adventist Church's Official Statements about "Same-Sex Unions" and "Homosexuality."
- <sup>2</sup> Fundamental Beliefs of Seventh-day Adventists, "Marriage and Family," No. 23.

# STATEMENT ON CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE

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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:
  - Endeavoring to treat with fairness persons accused of sexually abusing children,
  - Holding abusers accountable for their actions and administering appropriate discipline.

7. Support the education and enrichment of families and family members by:
  - Dispelling commonly held religious and cultural beliefs which may be used to justify or cover up child sexual abuse.
  - Building a healthy sense of personal worth in each child which enables him or her to respect self and others.
  - 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.)

# STATEMENT ON FAMILY VIOLENCE

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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:
  - Listening to and accepting those suffering from abuse, loving and affirming them as persons of value and worth.
  - Highlighting the injustices of abuse and speaking out in defense of victims both within the community of faith and in society.
  - 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.
  - Encouraging the training and placement of licensed Seventh-day Adventist professional services for both church members and the surrounding communities.
  - 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.
  - 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.
  - 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:
  - Providing family life education which is grace-oriented and includes a biblical understanding of the mutuality, equality, and respect indispensable to Christian relationships.
  - Increasing understanding of the factors that contribute to family violence.
  - Developing ways to prevent abuse and violence and the recurring cycle often observed within families and across generations.
  - 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 HOME AND FAMILY

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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.

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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 HOMOSEXUALITY

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The Seventh-day Adventist Church recognizes that every human being is valuable in the sight of God, and we seek to minister to all men and women in the spirit of Jesus. We also believe that by God's grace and through the encouragement of the community of faith, an individual may live in harmony with the principles of God's Word.

Seventh-day Adventists believe that sexual intimacy belongs only within the marital relationship of a man and a woman. This was the design established by God at creation. The Scriptures declare: "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and they will become one flesh" (Gen 2:24, NIV). Throughout Scripture this heterosexual pattern is affirmed. The Bible makes no accommodation for homosexual activity or relationships. Sexual acts outside the circle of a heterosexual marriage are forbidden (Lev 18:5-23, 26; Lev 20:7-21; Rom 1:24-27; 1 Cor 6:9-11). Jesus Christ reaffirmed the divine creation intent: "'Haven't you read,' he replied, 'that at the beginning the Creator "made them male and female," and said, "For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh?" So they are no longer two, but one"' (Matt 19:5, NIV). For these reasons Seventh-day Adventists are opposed to homosexual practices and relationships.

Jesus affirmed the dignity of all human beings and reached out compassionately to persons and families suffering the consequences of sin. He offered caring ministry and words of solace to struggling people, while differentiating His love for sinners from His clear teaching about sinful practices. As His disciples, Seventh-day Adventists endeavor to follow the Lord's instruction and example, living a life of Christ-like compassion and faithfulness.

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This statement was voted during the Annual Council of the General Conference Executive Committee on Sunday, October 3, 1999 in Silver Spring, Maryland. Revised by the General Conference Executive Committee, October 17, 2012.

# STATEMENT ON HUMAN RELATIONS

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Seventh-day Adventists deplore and seek to combat all forms of discrimination based on race, tribe, nationality, color, or gender. We believe that every person was created in the image of God, who made all nations of one blood (Acts 17:26). We endeavor to carry on the reconciling ministry of Jesus Christ, who died for the whole world so that in Him “there is neither Jew nor Greek” (Gal. 3:28). Any form of racism eats the heart out of the Christian gospel.

One of the most troubling aspects of our times is the manifestation of racism and tribalism in many societies, sometimes with violence, always with the denigration of men and women. As a worldwide body in more than 200 nations, Seventh-day Adventists seek to manifest acceptance, love, and respect toward all, and to spread this healing message throughout society.

The equality of all people is one of the tenets of our church. Our Fundamental Belief No. 13 states: “In Christ we are a new creation; distinctions of race, culture, learning and nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us. We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him, and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation.”

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This statement was approved and voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Administrative Committee (ADCOM) and was released by the Office of the President, Robert S. Folkenberg, at the General Conference session in Utrecht, the Netherlands, June 29-July 8, 1995.

# STATEMENT ON RACISM

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One of the odious evils of our day is racism, the belief or practice that views or treats certain racial groups as inferior and therefore justifiably the object of domination, discrimination, and segregation.

While the sin of racism is an age-old phenomenon based on ignorance, fear, estrangement, and false pride, some of its ugliest manifestations have taken place in our time. Racism and irrational prejudices operate in a vicious circle. Racism is among the worst of ingrained prejudices that characterize sinful human beings. Its consequences are generally more devastating because racism easily becomes permanently institutionalized and legalized and in its extreme manifestations can lead to systematic persecution and even genocide.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church deplores all forms of racism, including the political policy of apartheid with its enforced segregation and legalized discrimination.

Seventh-day Adventists want to be faithful to the reconciling ministry assigned to the Christian church. As a worldwide community of faith, the Seventh-day Adventist Church wishes to witness to and exhibit in her own ranks the unity and love that transcend racial differences and overcome past alienation between races.

Scripture plainly teaches that every person was created in the image of God, who “made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the

earth” (Acts 17:26). Racial discrimination is an offense against our fellow human beings, who were created in God’s image. In Christ “there is neither Jew nor Greek” (Gal. 3:28). Therefore, racism is really a heresy and in essence a form of idolatry, for it limits the fatherhood of God by denying the brotherhood of all mankind and by exalting the superiority of one’s own race.

The standard for Seventh-day Adventist Christians is acknowledged in the church’s Bible-based Fundamental Belief No. 13, “Unity in the Body of Christ.” Here it is pointed out: “In Christ we are a new creation; distinctions of race, culture, learning, and nationality, and differences between high and low, rich and poor, male and female, must not be divisive among us. We are all equal in Christ, who by one Spirit has bonded us into one fellowship with Him and with one another; we are to serve and be served without partiality or reservation.”

Any other approach destroys the heart of the Christian gospel.

# STATEMENT ON SEXUAL BEHAVIOR

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In His infinite love and wisdom God created mankind, both male and female, and in so doing based human society on the firm foundation of loving homes and families.

It is Satan's purpose, however, to pervert every good thing; and the perversion of the best inevitably leads to that which is worst. Under the influence of passion unrestrained by moral and religious principle, the association of the sexes has, to a deeply disturbing extent, degenerated into license and abuse which results in bondage. With the aid of many films, television, video, radio programs, and printed materials, the world is being steered on a course to new depths of shame and depravity. Not only is the basic structure of society being greatly damaged but also the breakdown of the family fosters other gross evils. The results in distorted lives of children and youth are distressing and evoke our pity, and the effects are not only disastrous but also cumulative.

These evils have become more open and constitute a serious and growing threat to the ideals and purposes of the Christian home. Sexual practices which are contrary to God's expressed will are adultery and premarital sex, as well as obsessive sexual behavior. Sexual abuse of spouses, sexual abuse of children, incest, homosexual practices (gay and lesbian), and bestiality are among the obvious perversions of God's original plan. As the intent of clear passages of Scripture (see Ex 20:14; Lev 18:22,23,29 and 20:13; Matthew 5:27,28; 1 Cor 6:9; 1 Tim 1:10; Rom 1:20-32) is denied and as their warnings are rejected in exchange for human opinions, much uncertainty and confusion prevail. This is what Satan

desires. He has always attempted to cause people to forget that when God as Creator made Adam, He also created Eve to be Adam's female companion ("male and female he created them" Gen 1:24 NEB). In spite of the clear moral standards set forth in God's Word for relationships between man and woman, the world today is witnessing a resurgence of the perversions and depravity that marked ancient civilizations.

The degrading results of the obsession of this age with sex and the pursuit of sensual pleasure are clearly described in the Word of God. But Christ came to destroy the works of the devil and reestablish the right relationship of human beings with each other and with their Creator. Thus, though fallen in Adam and captive to sin, those who turn to Christ in repentance receive full pardon and choose the better way, the way to complete restoration. By means of the cross, the power of the Holy Spirit in the "inner man," and the nurturing ministry of the Church, all may be freed from the grip of perversions and sinful practices.

An acceptance of God's free grace inevitably leads the individual believer to the kind of life and conduct that "will add luster to the doctrine of our God and Saviour" (Titus 2:10 NEB). It will also lead the corporate church to firm and loving discipline of the member whose conduct misrepresents the Saviour and distorts and lowers the true standards of Christian life and behavior.

The Church recognizes the penetrating truth and powerful motivations of Paul's words to Titus: "For the grace of God has dawned upon the world with healing for all mankind; and by it we are disciplined to renounce godless ways and worldly desires, and to live a life of temperance, honesty, and godliness in the present age, looking forward to the happy fulfilment of our hope when the splendor of our great God and Saviour Christ Jesus will appear. He it is who sacrificed himself for us, to set us free from all wickedness and to make us a pure people marked out for his own, eager to do good."—Titus 2:11-14, NEB. (See also 2 Peter 3:11-14.)

# STATEMENT ON THE BIBLICAL VIEW OF UNBORN LIFE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR ABORTION

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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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This statement was voted by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists Executive Committee at the Annual Council Session in Silver Spring, Maryland on October 16, 2019.

# STATEMENT ON THE NURTURE AND PROTECTION OF CHILDREN

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Seventh-day Adventists place a high value on children. In the light of the Bible they are seen as precious gifts from God entrusted to the care of parents, family, community of faith and society-at-large. Children possess enormous potential for making positive contributions to the Church and to society. Attention to their care, protection and development is extremely important.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church reaffirms and extends its longstanding efforts to nurture and safeguard children and youth from persons—known and unknown—whose actions perpetrate any form of abuse and violence against them and/or sexually exploit them. Jesus modeled the kind of respect, nurture, and protection children should be able to expect from adults entrusted with their care. Some of His strongest words of reproof were directed toward those who would harm them. Because of the trusting nature and dependence of children upon older and wiser adults and the life-changing consequences when this trust is breached, children require vigilant protection.

## **REDEMPTIVE CORRECTION**

The Seventh-day Adventist Church places a priority on church-based parent education that helps parents develop the skills necessary for a redemptive

approach to correction. Many children experience harsh punishment in the name of a biblical approach to discipline. Correction characterized by severe, punitive, dictatorial control often leads to resentment and rebellion. Such harsh discipline is also associated with heightened risk for physical and psychological harm to children as well as increased likelihood the youth will resort to coercion and violence in resolving their differences with others. By contrast, examples from Scripture as well as a large body of research confirm the effectiveness of more gentle forms of discipline that allow children to learn through reasoning and experiencing the consequences of their choices. Such milder measures have been demonstrated to increase the likelihood children will make life-affirming choices and espouse parental values as they mature.

### **MAKING CHURCH A SAFE PLACE FOR CHILDREN**

The Church also takes seriously its responsibility to minimize the risk for child sexual abuse and violence against children in the congregational setting. First and foremost, church leaders and members must themselves live by a strict code of ethics that precludes even the appearance of evil as regards the exploitation of minors for the gratification of adult desires. Other practical measures toward making church a safe place for children include attention to the safety of the church facility and its surroundings and the careful supervision and monitoring of children and their environment during all church-related activities. Education regarding what constitutes appropriate and inappropriate interaction between adults and children, the warning signs of abuse and violence, and the specific steps to be followed should inappropriate behavior be reported or suspected are vitally important. Pastors and church leaders who are visible and approachable play an important role in prevention as well as in responding well to the needs of children whose safety may have been jeopardized. Regular updates are needed regarding their moral and legal responsibility to report child abuse to appropriate civil authorities. The designation of trained personnel and specific protocols at wider levels of Church organization will help to ensure appropriate action and follow-through when abuse is reported within the church setting.

Because of the complex nature of the problem of child sexual abuse and violence against children, intervention and treatment of perpetrators requires resources beyond the scope of ministry provided by the local church. However, the presence of a known perpetrator in a congregation calls for the highest levels of vigilance. While perpetrators should be held fully responsible for their own behavior, the supervision of persons with a history of inappropriate behavior is necessary to ensure that such persons maintain appropriate distance and refrain

from all contact with children during church-related activities. Provision for alternative opportunities for perpetrators to grow spiritually in settings where children are not present greatly enhances child protection.

### **FOSTERING EMOTIONAL AND SPIRITUAL HEALING**

Children who have been personally victimized or who have witnessed disturbing events need the care of adults who treat them with sensitivity and understanding. Practical support that helps children and families maintain stability in the midst of turmoil empowers victims and their families and promotes healing. The Church's commitment to breaking the silence frequently associated with child sexual abuse and violence, its efforts toward advocacy and justice for all victims, and deliberate action to safeguard children from all forms of abuse and violence will contribute much toward the emotional and spiritual recovery of all concerned. The Church regards the nurture and protection of children as a sacred trust.

(This statement has been informed by the principles expressed in the following biblical passages: Lev. 18:6; 2 Sam. 13:1-11; 1 Kings 17:17-23; Ps. 9: 9, 12, 16-18; 11:5-7; 22:24; 34:18; 127:3-5; 128:3-4; Prov. 31:8-9; Is. 1:16-17; Jer. 22:3; Matt. 18:1-6; 21:9, 15-16; Mark 9:37; 10:13-16; Eph. 6:4; Col. 3:21; 1Tim. 5:8; Heb. 13:3.)

# STATEMENT ON TRANSGENDERISM

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The increasing awareness of the needs and challenges that transgender men and women experience and the rise of transgender issues to social prominence worldwide raise important questions not only for those affected by the transgender phenomenon but also for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. While the struggles and challenges of those identifying as transgender people have some elements in common with the struggles of all human beings, we recognize the uniqueness of their situation and the limitation of our knowledge in specific instances. Yet, we believe that Scripture provides principles for guidance and counsel to transgender people and the Church, transcending human conventions and culture.

## **THE TRANSGENDER PHENOMENON**

In modern society, gender identity typically denotes “the public (and usually legally recognized) lived role as boy or girl, man or woman,” while sex refers “to the biological indicators of male and female.”<sup>1</sup> Gender identification usually aligns with a person’s biological sex at birth. However, misalignment may happen at the physical and/or mental-emotional levels.

On the physical level ambiguity in genitalia may result from anatomical and physiological abnormalities so that it cannot be clearly established whether a

child is male or female. This ambiguity of anatomical sexual differentiation is often called hermaphroditism or intersexualism.<sup>2</sup>

On the mental-emotional level misalignment occurs with transgender people whose sexual anatomy is clearly male or female but who identify with the opposite gender of their biological sex. They may describe themselves as being trapped in a wrong body. Transgenderism, formerly clinically diagnosed as “gender identity disorder” and now termed “gender dysphoria,” may be understood as a general term to describe the variety of ways individuals interpret and express their gender identity differently from those who determine gender on the basis of biological sex.<sup>3</sup> “Gender dysphoria is manifested in a variety of ways, including strong desires to be treated as the other gender or to be rid of one’s sex characteristics, or a strong conviction that one has feelings and reactions typical of the other gender.”<sup>4</sup>

Due to contemporary trends to reject the biblical gender binary (male and female) and replace it with a growing spectrum of gender types, certain choices triggered by the transgender condition have come to be regarded as normal and accepted in contemporary culture. However, the desire to change or live as a person of another gender may result in biblically inappropriate lifestyle choices. Gender dysphoria may, for instance, result in cross-dressing,<sup>5</sup> sex reassignment surgery, and the desire to have a marital relationship with a person of the same biological sex. On the other hand, transgender people may suffer silently, living a celibate life or being married to a spouse of the opposite sex.

## **BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES RELATING TO SEXUALITY AND THE TRANSGENDER PHENOMENON**

As the transgender phenomenon must be evaluated by Scripture, the following biblical principles and teachings may help the community of faith relate to people affected by gender dysphoria in a biblical and Christ-like way:

1. God created humanity as two persons who are respectively identified as male and female in terms of gender. The Bible inextricably ties gender to biological sex (Gen 1:27; 2:22-24) and does not make a distinction between the two. The Word of God affirms complementarity as well as clear distinctions between male and female in creation. The Genesis creation account is foundational to all questions of human sexuality.
2. From a biblical perspective, the human being is a psychosomatic unity. For example, Scripture repeatedly calls the entire human being a soul (Gen 2:7; Jer 13:17; 52:28-30; Ezek 18:4; Acts 2:41; 1 Cor 15:45), a body (Eph 5:28; Rom 12:1-2; Rev 18:13), flesh (1 Pet 1:24), and spirit (2 Tim 4:22; 1 John 4:1-3). Thus,

the Bible does not endorse dualism in the sense of a separation between one's body and one's sense of sexuality. In addition, an immortal part of humans is not envisioned in Scripture because God alone possesses immortality (1 Tim 6:14-16) and will bestow it on those who believe in Him at the first resurrection (1 Cor 15:51-54). Thus, a human being is also meant to be an undivided sexual entity, and sexual identity cannot be independent from one's body. According to Scripture, our gender identity, as designed by God, is determined by our biological sex at birth (Gen 1:27; 5:1-2; Ps 139:13-14; Mark 10:6).

3. Scripture acknowledges, however, that due to the Fall (Gen 3:6-19) the whole human being — that is, our mental, physical, and spiritual faculties — are affected by sin (Jer 17:9; Rom 3:9; 7:14-23; 8:20-23; Gal 5:17) and need to be renewed by God (Rom 12:2). Our emotions, feelings, and perceptions are not fully reliable indicators of God's designs, ideals, and truth (Prov 14:12; 16:25). We need guidance from God through Scripture to determine what is in our best interest and live according to His will (2 Tim 3:16).
4. The fact that some individuals claim a gender identity incompatible with their biological sex reveals a serious dichotomy. This brokenness or distress, whether felt or not, is an expression of the damaging effects of sin on humans and may have a variety of causes. Although gender dysphoria is not intrinsically sinful, it may result in sinful choices. It is another indicator that, on a personal level, humans are involved in the great controversy.
5. As long as transgender people are committed to ordering their lives according to the biblical teachings on sexuality and marriage they can be members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. The Bible clearly and consistently identifies any sexual activity outside of heterosexual marriage as sin (Matt 5:28, 31-32; 1 Tim 1:8-11; Heb 13:4). Alternative sexual lifestyles are sinful distortions of God's good gift of sexuality (Rom 1:21-28; 1 Cor 6:9-10).
6. Because the Bible regards humans as wholistic entities and does not differentiate between biological sex and gender identity, the Church strongly cautions transgender people against sex reassignment surgery and against marriage, if they have undergone such a procedure. From the biblical wholistic viewpoint of human nature, a full transition from one gender to another and the attainment of an integrated sexual identity cannot be expected in the case of sex reassignment surgery.
7. The Bible commands followers of Christ to love everyone. Created in the image of God, they must be treated with dignity and respect. This includes transgender people. Acts of ridicule, abuse, or bullying towards transgender people are incompatible with the biblical commandment, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Mark 12:31).

8. The Church as the community of Jesus Christ is meant to be a refuge and place of hope, care, and understanding to all who are perplexed, suffering, struggling, and lonely, for “a bruised reed He will not break, and smoking flax He will not quench” (Matt 12:20). All people are invited to attend the Seventh-day Adventist Church and enjoy the fellowship of its believers. Those who are members can fully participate in church life as long as they embrace the message, mission, and values of the Church.
9. The Bible proclaims the good news that sexual sins committed by heterosexuals, homosexuals, transgender people, or others can be forgiven, and lives can be transformed through faith in Jesus Christ (1 Cor 6:9-11).
10. Those who experience incongruity between their biological sex and gender identity are encouraged to follow biblical principles in dealing with their distress. They are invited to reflect on God’s original plan of purity and sexual fidelity. Belonging to God, all are called to honor Him with their bodies and their lifestyle choices (1 Cor 6:19). With all believers, transgender people are encouraged to wait on God and are offered the fullness of divine compassion, peace, and grace in anticipation of Christ’s soon return when all true followers of Christ will be completely restored to God’s ideal.

## NOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, 5th ed. (DSM-5TM), edited by the American Psychiatric Association (Washington, DC: American Psychiatric Publishing, 2013), 451.
- <sup>2</sup> Those born with ambiguous genitalia may or may not benefit from corrective surgical treatment.
- <sup>3</sup> See DSM-5TM, 451-459.
- <sup>4</sup> This sentence is part of a succinct summary of gender dysphoria provided to introduce DSM-5TM that was published in 2013 (accessed April 11, 2017).
- <sup>5</sup> Cross-dressing, also referred to as transvestite behavior, is prohibited in Deuteronomy 22:5.



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