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Family TO *Family*

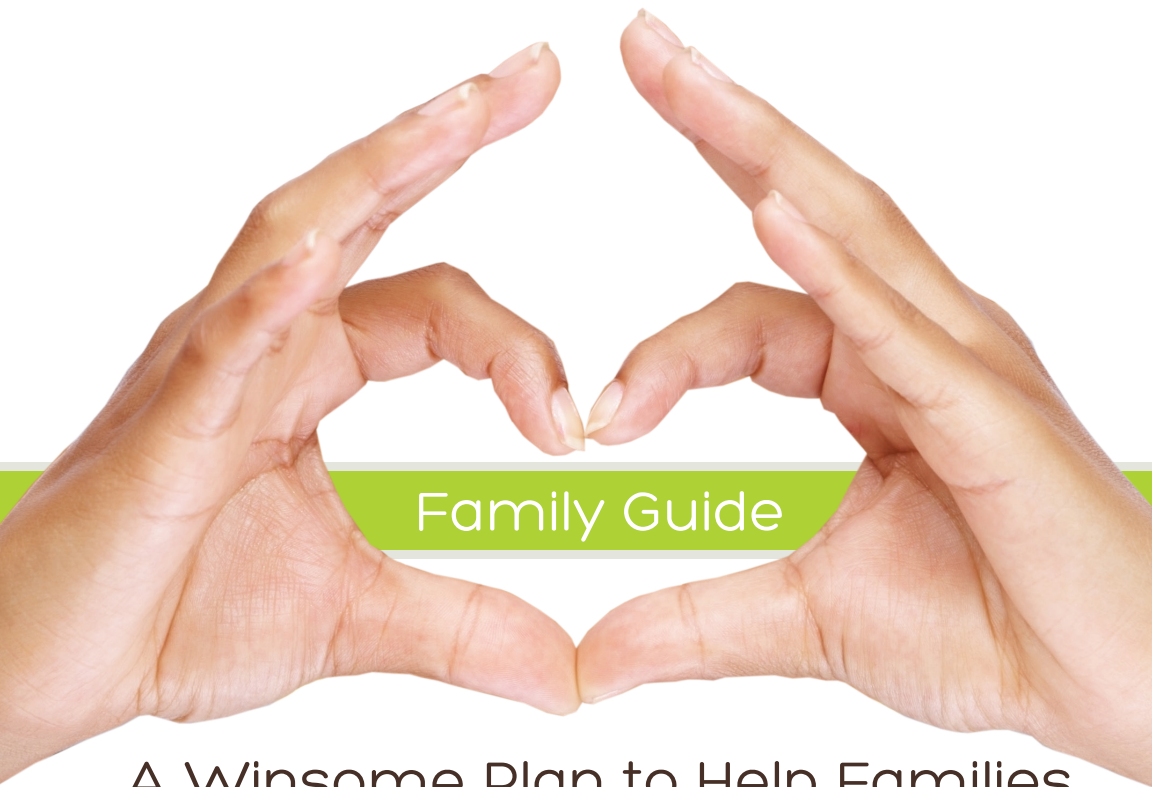
Because relationships need to be nurtured

Each family discipling another family

Family Guide



Adventist
Family Ministries



Family Guide

A Winsome Plan to Help Families
Witness in Their Communities

Department of Family Ministries of the General Conference of the
Seventh-day Adventist Church

Adapted from the West Central Brazil Union Mission in the South
American Division

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Introduction

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

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

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

How to Use This *Family Guide*

Introduction

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

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

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

Phase 1: Prepare

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



Phase 2: Care

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

Phase 3: Share

The purpose of this final part is to share the gospel. Church families invite neighborhood families to attend an evangelistic meeting. This phase takes place over a 4-month period and encourages everyone to eventually be involved in small group Bible studies to foster continued growth in Christ. During this time your family will continue to build friendships with community family(ies), invite them to an evangelistic series and attend the series with them, and then help them continue to grow in Christ.

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

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

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



Prayer Journal

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

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

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

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

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



Monthly Steps

Phase 1: Prepare

Month 1

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

Month 2

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



- ☐ Participate in the day of fasting and prayer, asking God to help your family be a witness for Jesus to your neighbors.

Phase 2: Care

Month 3

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

Month 4

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

Month 5

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



- ☐ Attend the monthly FTF meeting for continued support and encouragement.

Month 6

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

Month 7

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

- ☐ Attend the monthly FTF meeting for continued support and encouragement.

Month 8

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

Phase 3: Share

Month 9

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

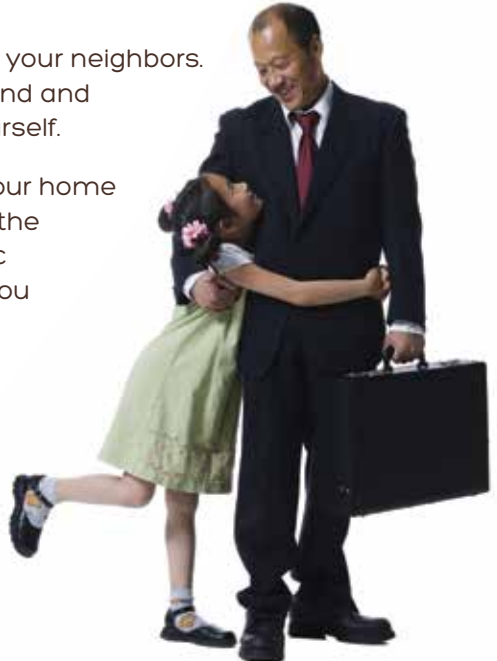
- ☐ Attend the monthly FTF meeting for continued support and encouragement.

Month 10

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

Month 11

- ☐ Continue morning devotions with your family (the evangelistic series can be your evening devotions) and keep praying for all the families in your prayer journal.
- ☐ Attend the evangelistic series with your neighbors. And even if they do not come, attend and support the evangelistic series yourself.
- ☐ If you are holding Bible studies in your home (or in their home), temporarily stop the studies and attend the evangelistic meetings. After the series is over you can resume your Bible study.
- ☐ There is no FTF meeting during the evangelistic series.



Month 12

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



Daily Devotionals

1-SECRETS OF A HAPPY HOME

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

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

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



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

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

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

Pastor Juracy Santiago Castelo
- Central Brazil Conference



2-FAMILIES TO REFLECT THE GOODNESS OF GOD

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

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

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

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

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

Parents need to appreciate more fully the responsibility and honor that God has placed upon them, in making them, to the child, the

representative of Himself. The character revealed in the contact of daily life will interpret to the child, for good or for evil, those words of God:

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

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

3-EDEN, THE FIRST HOME

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

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

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

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

holy existence... In mental and physical activity Adam found one of the highest pleasures of his holy existence... The holy pair were not only children under the fatherly care of God but students receiving instruction from the all-wise Creator... The order and harmony of creation spoke to them of infinite wisdom and power. They were ever discovering some attraction that filled their hearts with deeper love and called forth fresh expressions of gratitude.

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

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

4-ABRAHAM OBEYED GOD'S VOICE

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

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

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

How few there are in our day who follow this example! On the part of too many parents there is a blind and selfish sentimentalism, miscalled love, which is manifested in leaving children, with their un-

formed judgment and undisciplined passions, to the control of their own will. This is the veriest cruelty to the youth, and a great wrong to the world. Parental indulgence causes disorder in families and in society. This is the veriest cruelty to the youth, and a great wrong to the world. Parental indulgence causes disorder in families and in society. It confirms in the young the desire to follow inclination, instead of submitting to the divine requirements. Thus they grow up with a heart averse to doing God's will, and they transmit their irreligious, insubordinate spirit to their children and children's children. Like Abraham, parents should command their households after them. Let obedience to parental authority be taught and enforced as the first step in obedience to the authority of God...

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

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

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

5—COURAGEOUS WOMEN IN TIMES OF CRISIS

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

In today's passage the role of a woman is portrayed in a big way during a time of crisis. Israel was about to



be destroyed because of the envy of Haman. Apparently there was no solution, but God raised up a sensitive and wise woman named Esther who presented herself before the king and interceded for her people. Queen Esther is an example of Jesus, who also intercedes for God's children.

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

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

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

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

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

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

6-HOW TO IMPROVE YOUR MARRIAGE

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

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

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

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

1. Do not compare your marriage with other marriages. Treat your marriage as a unique relationship. All marriages have challenges. Keep Jesus as your standard.
2. Review your marriage goals on a regular basis. Where are you falling short? You should do this at least once a year. What area needs improvement? Where do you have conflict? How much time do you spend together?
3. Talk to each other. It is not enough to be together. Someone once said that without television commercials people would never talk to each other. A wife once complained that she did not have enough time to resolve problems with her husband because television commercials were too short!
4. Manage your finances together. The three biggest problems in a typical marriage are money, sex, and in-laws. Financial problems are much greater than you might think. It is important to set a budget and follow it. Money is a very sensitive area of conflict in a lot of marriages.

5. Share affectionate words with each other. Remember the kind notes and cards from your dating years? Keep giving to your spouse loving words. Compliment her hairstyle, his tie, the food, the work... If there is genuine love, it will be shown in our words and actions. Repeating tender words helps keep the romance alive. Say "I love you" often and then seal it with a heartfelt kiss!

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

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

7-LONG LIFE PROMISED FOR HONORING PARENTS

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

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

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

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

parents, but also to give them love and tenderness, to lighten their cares, to guard their reputation, and to succor and comfort them in old age.

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

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

8–JESUS’ RECIPE FOR A HAPPY MARRIAGE

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

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

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

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

Robert Burns re-wrote 1 Corinthians 13. His paraphrase reads: “My home could be filled with worldly riches, but if does not have love it will be an empty shell. My home could be place where intelligent people meet,

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

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

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

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

9-REBEKAH: THE DIVINE CHOICE

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

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



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

10-JOB OFFERED SACRIFICES FOR HIS CHILDREN

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

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

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

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

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

11-LOVE IN THE HOME

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

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

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

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

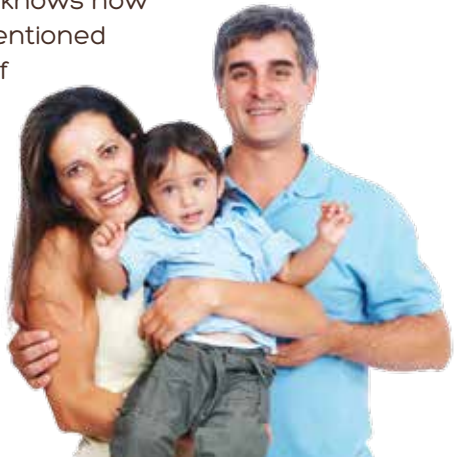
"John," asked the pastor, "Mary was a good wife, was not she?"

"Yes," replied John.

"You loved her, isn't that true, John?"

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

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



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

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

12—EDUCATING CHILDREN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



choose the wrong path, at least parents would still know they did the best they could.

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

13—THE CHURCH IN THE HOME

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

14-WHY DO MARRIAGES FAIL?

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

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

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

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

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

Speaking of children of divorce, a Los Angeles Times article once stated, "Falling in love, becoming engaged and getting married all are serious decisions. Yet most young people enter marital life with less care than someone choosing a partner to run a popcorn cart. Sexual passion, common to all animals, takes the place of love and affection."

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

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

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

15–FAMILY WORSHIP NOT TO BE NEGLECTED

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

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

While we endeavor to secure the comfort and happiness of our guests, let us not overlook our obligation to God. The hour of prayer should not be neglected for any consideration. ... At an early hour of the evening, when you can pray unhurriedly and understandingly, present your supplication, and raise your voices in happy, grateful praise. Let

all who visit Christians see that the hour of prayer is the most sacred, the most precious, and the happiest hour of the day. Such an example will not be without effect.

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

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

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

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

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

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



16-LOVE DOES NOT TAKE INTO ACCOUNT A WRONG SUFFERED

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

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

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

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

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

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

-Daily Meditations, p. 23

17-HOUSEHOLD HARMONY

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

As it happens in many families, Jacob's family had problems. Joseph was a cherished son. One day, his father gave him a multi-colored tunic as gift. His brothers' jealousy had been growing for some time and this was the last straw.

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

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

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

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

-Daily Meditations, p. 126



18-HOUSEHOLD DIALOG

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

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

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

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

If couples are thinking about separation, they should stop and think about the wounded hearts they will cause in their children, the absence of father or mother from their children, the lack of support, advice and companionship caused by divorce. Couples should think carefully about how their choices will impact others.



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

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

—*Daily Meditations*, p. 152

19—LOST CHILDREN OR LOST PARENTS?

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

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

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

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

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

These two stories speak more about lost parents than about lost children.

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

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

—*Daily Meditations*, p. 165

20—WHAT DID THEY SEE IN YOUR HOME?

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

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

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

That same question is asked of us by angels after we have visitors in our own homes. They too ask, "What did they see in your house?" What people see in our homes can be divided into three groups: First, in some homes people mostly see material possessions. They see

rich furniture, fancy curtains, and impressive silverware. Such houses are like museums, but little more. Second, there are some homes where visitors mostly notice the people who live in the house. Perhaps they notice a gentle householder; a talented or conceited housewife; children that sometimes dominate the room like little tyrants. And finally, there are homes where visitors are most impressed, not by the things or people, but the atmosphere of the house. Maybe it is filled with peace and devotion. Visitors leave such homes encouraged in their faith in God. They sensed in these homes the presence of angels.

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

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

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

21-TIME FOR CHILDREN

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

-*Daily Meditations*, p. 346

22-A SONG OF LOVE

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

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

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



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

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

While we were children growing up in the home, my parents openly demonstrated their affection for each other. Even in their old age, when we brought them to our home, their love affair continued. Even the grandchildren witnessed this affection. Vesta and I have tried to follow their example since our wedding day. After all, life is uncertain. If something happens to us, we want our last memory from the other to be a happy one.

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

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

23-HOME - A PLACE OF LOVE

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

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

A man once visited a counselor to discuss the best things he could do for his children. He hoped to receive advice about education—which school they should attend, what cultural advantages he should provide them. However, the counselor's response surprised him. He said, "The

best thing a father can do for his children is to love their mother. The child who lives in a home where the father truly loves his wife is a blessed child, much more than the one whose father is willing to write big checks."

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

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

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

—*Daily Meditations*, p. 346

24—THE HOME OF GOD

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

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

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

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

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

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

25—THE INFLUENCE OF A CHRISTIAN HOME

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

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

Suppose that because some ship had disregarded his warning beacon, and gone to pieces on the rocks, the lighthouse keeper should put out his lights, and say, "I will pay no more attention to the lighthouse"; what would be the consequence? But that is not the way he does. He keeps his lights burning all night, throwing their beams far out into the darkness, for the benefit of every mariner that comes within the dangerous reach of rocks and shoals. Were some ship to be wrecked

because the lights went out, it would be telegraphed over the world that on such a night, at such a point, a ship went to pieces on the rocks because there was no light in the tower. But if some ships are wrecked because they pay no attention to the light, the lighthouse keeper is guiltless; they were warned, but they paid no heed.

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

The Christian's first duty is in the home. Fathers and mothers, yours is a great responsibility. You are preparing your children for life or for death; you are training them for an abiding place here in the earth, for self-gratification in this life, or for the immortal life, to praise God forever. And which shall it be? It should be the burden of your life to have every child that God has committed to your trust receive the divine mold (*Signs of the Times*, Nov.14, 1886).

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

26—THE BIBLE IS THE VOICE OF GOD TO FAMILIES

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

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

In too many households prayer is neglected. Parents feel that they have no time for morning and evening worship. They cannot spare a few moments to be spent in thanksgiving to God for His abundant

mercies—for the blessed sunshine and the showers of rain, which cause vegetation to flourish, and for the guardianship of holy angels. They have no time to offer prayer for divine help and guidance and for the abiding presence of Jesus in the household. They go forth to labor... without one thought of God or heaven. They have souls so precious that rather than permit them to be hopelessly lost, the Son of God gave His life to ransom them...

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

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

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

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

27-LAYING HOLD OF THE MIGHTY ONE OF HEAVEN

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

Your children should be taught to control their tempers and to cultivate a loving, Christlike spirit. So direct them that they will love the service of



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

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

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

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

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

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

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

28-AN ARGUMENT INFIDELS CANNOT RESIST

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

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

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

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

Then, Christian friends, fathers and mothers, let your light grow dim—no, never! Let your heart grow faint, or your hands weary—no, never! And by and by the portals of the celestial city will be opened to you; and you may present yourselves and your children before the throne, saying, "Here am I, and the children whom Thou hast given



me" (Isa. 8:18). And what a reward for faithfulness that will be, to see your children crowned with immortal life in the beautiful city of God! - *Signs of the Times*, Jan. 14, 1886.

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

29-HOW TO UNITE HEARTS

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

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

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

A son once had a serious argument with his father. The mother watched the heated discussion but remained silent. When the son left the house, she said to her husband: "Ernest, you were not right. Why are you so demanding of the boy?"

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

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

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

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

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

30-PRINCIPLES OF A HAPPY HOME

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

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

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

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

However, there are other simple and practical factors that may positively influence a couples' relationship. I call them "Special Moments."



The first is our *Moment with God*. Do we take time every day for personal worship? Do we fast and pray? Do we read our Bibles? Each of us needs quiet time alone with God.

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

The third is our *Family Moments*. While family worship is very important, there also needs to be time for talking and sharing. Each family member needs to hear about the little victories or disappointments in each other's day. Such companionship builds intimacy in the family and is essential. Marriage is often called a journey, but we are all seeking a destination—heaven! We arrive there by growing each day in Christ. Families need to learn to deal with conflict. They need to learn to say, "I'm sorry. Please forgive me. I was wrong."

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

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

31-LOVING: WHEN AND HOW?

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

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

The first love we meet in life is our dad and mom's love. Next, we experience love from our siblings and friends. Then we see love in the adolescence years when a boy is attracted to a girl and a girl to a boy.

As young adults people begin to think seriously about planning a future home. A young man becomes interested in and chooses a special young lady. If they are attending college, marriage often comes after graduation. All of these different types of love influence the love that follows.

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

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

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

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

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



Notes



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