

Families in the Family of God

Keys to Family Unity

Lesson #8 for February 25, 2006

Scriptures: Gen. 33:12-14, Ruth 1:16-18, John 17:21-26, Gal. 3:28, Eph. 2:11-22, 5:21-6:9.

1. What can we do to make our families more loving, happier, and more Christian?
2. "The week at a glance: the Bible exalts Christ as the great Center who draws all disconnected relationships together in His body on the cross." What does this mean to you? When there's a squabble in your family between husband and wife or between parents and children how can the body of Christ help us to solve our differences?
3. **What are the greatest barriers to unity in families? Would selfishness qualify as the single greatest barrier? If we could make the example of Christ our daily example and each day grow to become more like Him how would this affect our family relationships?**
4. Ephesians 2:11-22 has some interesting things to say about relationships! Paul suggests that the death of Christ on the cross has broken down the wall of separation between formerly Jewish Christians and formerly Gentile Christians. How does this actually work? Our lesson study guide suggests that this process of making peace between two separate groups is the good news that helps couples to truly know "one-flesh" unity in marriage.
5. There was a time when Paul had a great deal of difficulty with his former congregation at Corinth. But after Paul had returned to Ephesus and written them a "Sinai" letter, they realized their mistakes and welcomed him back again. In the glow of that victory for Christianity, Paul states in 2 Corinthians 5:17,18: "¹⁷Anyone who is joined to Christ is a new being; the old is gone, the new has come. ¹⁸All this is done by God, who through Christ changed us from enemies into his friends and gave us the task of making others his friends also." (GNB).
6. Ephesians 4:24-32 suggests that the Holy Spirit helps to give us new hearts and new minds and to put away all the irritating habits that annoy our families and friends. Is this what is required to produce a Christian marriage?
7. If we each one were drawing closer to Christ each day would we not be growing closer to each other? Just as the spokes of a wheel coming together at the center are drawing closer to each other?
8. How does a commitment to Christ that is really meaningful in one's life help you to submit to the Lord and to one another in a marriage? (Ephesians 5:21)
9. **What would happen in a home if each member of the family was constantly seeking ways to meet the other's needs and to make them happier? Is this an impossible goal for selfish human beings?**
10. It should be clear that these kinds of improvements in the home do not happen by accident! It requires a mutual plan and commitment to work at it every day. Can we do this?
11. What type of love is most important in a marriage relationship? Think of the four types of love described in the Greek New Testament: *eros* (sexual love), *epithumia* (desire, passion), *philia* (friendship love), *agape* (selfless love).
12. Think over what you know about the disciple John. We recognize that in his early years he was self-willed, critical, hot-tempered, even power-hungry. But Jesus saw something very important in this disciple and "kept on loving" him. The transformation in John's life was so remarkable that he became known as the "beloved disciple". Did anyone else called John the beloved disciple besides John himself? (Five times between John 13 and 21)

13. Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. Does this passage describe you and your family at home?
14. "However carefully and wisely marriage may have been entered into, few couples are completely united when the [360] marriage ceremony is performed. The real union of the two in wedlock is the work of the after years." Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, pages 359, 360 (1905); AH 105.2; 1MCP 153.1.
15. The *Teacher's Bible Study Guide* mentions six ways in which we can work on the unity in marriage:
 - a. build on the right foundation.
 - b. never allow anyone or anything to create a barrier between family members or even between husband and wife.
 - c. try to learn to love others within your family in ways that are most meaningful to them. This is the best way to meet their needs.
 - d. practice the fruits of the Spirit (Galatians 5: 22, 23) on each other every day.
 - e. maintain a true spiritual relationship with God through Bible study and prayer. This needs to be done individually and as a family.
 - f. exercise grace toward each other.

Do these six ways describe your family? Why? Or why not?

16. Marriage counseling has become quite a science. Ellen White suggests that it could be a lot easier: "Conversation has been protracted for hours between the parties concerned, and not only has their time been wasted, but the servants of God are held to listen to them, when the hearts of both parties are unsubdued by grace. **If pride and selfishness were laid aside, five minutes would remove most difficulties.** Hours have been spent in justifying self, which has grieved angels, and displeased God. I saw that God will not wait and bow down and listen to long justifications, and he did not want his servants to do so, and precious time be wasted, that should be spent in showing transgressors the error of their ways, and pulling souls out of the fire." Ellen G. White, *ExV54* 39.4; *Early Writings*, 119
17. What do you think happened to human nature when sin entered our world? Why do you think Satan has been so successful at implanting selfishness in our lives? How quickly did Adam and Eve deteriorate from being completely loving to being dominated by selfishness? How can we reverse this trend?
18. How many people would recognize that loving people are happier than selfish people? If our goal is to be happy why is it so difficult to be loving?
19. What would happen if each member of the family tried to think of some loving, kind deed they could do for another member in the family every day?
20. **Unfortunately, many young people enter into marriage primarily looking for what they can get out of it instead of what they can put into it! Isn't this a basic characteristic of selfish human beings?**
21. Respect must be earned. Even in a close relationship like marriage. Submission can never be commanded although some have tried! What is the best way for husbands and wives to earn the respect of their spouses?
22. If you were to rate your family on the unity scale with one being least and 10 being most what number would you give yourselves?
23. What do you think Paul had in mind when he said submit to one another? (Ephesians 5:21). Read Ephesians 5:21-6:9. Three very important and very common relationships are described in these verses. Why do you think Paul always spoke to the "weaker" member of the pair in each relationship before speaking to the one who is usually more dominant? What do these

verses tell us to do to try to improve our relationships?

24. Read John 13:35. (Compare Acts 4:13) This verse suggests that true Christians if they can demonstrate *agape* love will surprise the world! Do the members of your class fit into this category?

25. How deep is your commitment to Christ, to your spouse, to your family and to the church? What will the devil do to try to break down these commitments? What barriers exist in these relationships?

“All the world knows of the Christians who were flung to the lions or burned at the stake; but these were kindly deaths. Nero wrapped the Christians in pitch and set them alight, and used them as living torches to light his gardens. He sewed them in the skins of wild animals and set his hunting dogs upon them to tear them to death. They were tortured on the rack; they were scraped with pincers; molten lead was poured hissing upon them; red hot brass plates were affixed to the tenderest parts of their bodies; eyes were torn out; parts of their bodies were cut off and roasted before their eyes; their hands and feet were burned while cold water was poured over them to lengthen the agony. These things are not pleasant to think about, but these are the things a man had to be prepared for, if he took his stand with Christ.”—Barclay, “The Gospel of Matthew,” *The Daily Study Bible*, revised edition, vol. 2, p. 112. (comment on Matthew 5:10-12)

Will this type of torture and persecution come again?

26. Does the world recognize the difference between Christians and other religious groups? Are Christians loved by communists? Atheists? Hindus? Moslems? Why? Or why not?

27. What is the Seventh-day Adventist church known for? Will we ever be known for something really important like what we say to the world about our loving heavenly Father? How will this possibly come to pass?

“The first work of Christians is to be united in the family. Then the work is to extend to their neighbors nigh and afar off. Those who have received light are to let the light shine forth in clear rays. Their words, fragrant with the love of Christ, are to be a savor of life unto life. {MS 11, 1901; AH 37.4}

The more closely the members of a family are united in their work in the home, the more uplifting and helpful will be the influence that father and mother and sons and daughters will exert outside the home.” {MS 11, 1901; AH 37.5}

“The cause of division and discord in families and in the church is separation from Christ. To come near to Christ is to come near to one another. The secret of true unity in the church and in the family is not diplomacy, not management, not a superhuman effort to overcome difficulties--though there will be much of this to do--but union with Christ. Picture a large circle, from the edge of which are many lines all running to the center. The nearer these lines approach the center, the nearer they are to one another.

Thus it is in the Christian life. The closer we come to Christ, the nearer we shall be to one another. God is glorified as His people unite in harmonious action.” {Letter 49, 1904; AH 179.1-3; 2MCP 501.4-502.1}

28. What can we do within our families, our Sabbath school classes, our churches, and our denomination to let the world know that Christianity really makes a difference in our lives?

© 2005 Kenneth Hart M. D. ***Permission is hereby granted for any non-commercial use of these materials. Free distribution is encouraged. It is our goal to see them spread as widely and freely as possible. If you would like to use them for your class or even make copies of portions of them, feel free to do so. We always enjoy hearing about how you might be using the materials and we might even want to share good ideas with others, so let us know.***

khart@llu.edu

Last modified: February 3, 2006
C:\My Documents\WP\SS\TG-Hart\Families\SS-Families#8-2006-02-25.wpd