

Family Seasons

Keys to Family Unity

Lesson #7 for May 18, 2019

Scriptures: Genesis 33:12-14; Ruth 1:16-18; John 17:21-26; Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:11-22; 5:21-6:9.

1. This lesson will discuss some of the challenges of living together as families. No other human relationship was intended by God to be so close. As families, we live together 24/7 in relationships that have proved to be challenges for selfish human beings.
2. Think of the changes that are brought about by marriage. And these are often followed by changes that are brought by the arrival of children. Try to imagine what God intended by bringing Adam and Eve together in the first marriage. Unfortunately, that marriage did not last long enough within the Garden of Eden for us to see what should have happened when children arrived.
3. Read Ephesians 2:13-16 and Colossians 1:21-23. In these passages Paul discussed the ideal kind of unity which should exist in the churches which he had established that included both former-Jews and former-Gentiles. In what way do these principles apply to us in marriage? Before his conversion, Paul had been married; but, after that, he was single.
4. Read Ephesians 2:11-22 and Galatians 3:28. How does Christ's life and death on the cross serve to bring us together as members of a **Christian family**? How should we understand this in the light of the great controversy? If Jews and Gentiles can be brought together by the death of Christ, should that make it possible for husbands and wives, parents and children, even masters and slaves to "become one" in Christ Jesus? What does it mean to be a fellow citizen with God's people? Jews and Gentiles did not have to live together 24/7.
5. The ancient temple in Jerusalem had segregation zones. There were: (1) Certain areas where Gentiles were allowed to enter; (2) Other areas where only Jews were allowed to enter; (3) Some areas where only Jewish men were allowed to enter; (4) Some areas where only priests were allowed to enter; and, finally, (5) The most holy place where only the high priest was allowed to enter. Paul seemed to suggest that all those barriers should be torn down. In what ways does tearing down those barriers make it possible to have better relationships in a marriage? Galatians 3:28-29 tells us that we are to be "one" in union with Christ Jesus. Such an idea sounds great theologically; but, how difficult is it to accomplish that in a home?
6. Read Romans 6:4-7; 2 Corinthians 5:17; and Ephesians 4:24-32. Paul suggested that when we are baptized, we set aside all causes of disunity. Is that true?
7. Try to imagine how things will be when we get to heaven. We will not only live with male and female, Jew and Gentile, rich and poor groups, etc., but also we will live with people who have existed in different time-settings and different cultures throughout the history of our world. If we cannot learn to live successfully with a spouse that we love and with children that we have given birth to, how will we possibly be able to cooperate for eternity with that enormous variety of individuals, not counting the angels and the beings who live in other worlds? And what language will we speak? Is it any wonder that God says we must learn to get along here and now before we get there! How will we relate to Adam and Eve?

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....

The closer we come to Christ, the nearer we shall be 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—Ellen G. White, *Letter 49*,* 1904; *The Adventist Home** 179.2-3; *2MCP** 501.5-502.1.

8. What effect has your Christianity and your membership in your local church had on your unity as a Christian family?
9. In His prayer just before He was arrested and ultimately crucified, Jesus prayed for Himself, for His initial disciples, and then for all of us. Consider especially:

John 17:22-23: ²² “I gave them the same glory you gave me, so that they may be one, just as you and I are one: ²³I in them and you in me, so that they may be completely one, in order that the world may know that you sent me and that you love them as you love me.”—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., John 17:22–23). New York: American Bible Society.

10. How would you describe the “oneness” of the Father and the Son? How can we be one as They are one? How does the Holy Spirit fit in?

Keep yourselves where the three great powers of heaven—the Father, the Son, and the Holy Spirit—can be your efficiency. These powers work with the one who gives himself unreservedly to God. The strength of heaven is at the command of God’s believing ones. The man who makes God his trust is barricaded by an impregnable wall.—Ellen G. White, *The Southern Watchman*,* February 23, 1904, par. 2-3; *7aSDABC** 442.2; *HP** 176.5.

We do not go deep enough in our search for truth. Every soul who believes present truth will be brought where he will be required to give a reason of the hope that is in him. The people of God will be called upon to stand before kings, princes, rulers, and great men of the earth, and they must know that they do know what is truth. **They must be converted men and women. God can teach you more in one moment by his Holy Spirit than you could learn from the great men of the earth.** The universe is looking upon the controversy that is going on upon the earth. At an infinite cost, God has provided for every man an opportunity to know that which will make him wise unto salvation. How eagerly do angels look to see who will avail himself of this opportunity! [Luke 15:7,10] When a message is presented to God’s people, they should not rise up in opposition to it; they should go to the Bible, comparing it with the law and the testimony, and if it does not bear this test, it is not true. God wants our minds to expand. He desires to put his grace upon us. We may have a feast of good things every day; for God can open the whole treasure of heaven to us. **We are to be one with Christ as he is one with the Father, and the Father will love us as he loves his Son. We may have the same help that Christ had, we may have strength for every emergency; for God will be our front guard and our reeward [sic. rearward].** He will shut us in on every side, and when we are brought before rulers, before the authorities of the earth, we need not meditate beforehand of what we shall say. God will teach us in the day of our need. Now may God help us to come to the feet of Jesus and learn of him, before we seek to become teachers of others.—Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald*,* February 18, 1890, par. 23. [Bold type and content in brackets are added.]

11. Do we clearly understand the meaning of *agape love*? *Agape* love describes love which reaches out to others for their benefit and not for ours. That is the very nature of God's love. (1 John 4:8) More than that, it describes Jesus's followers so distinctly that they stand out from all others.

John 13:34-35: ³⁴ "And now I give you a new commandment: love one another. As I have loved you, so you must love one another. ³⁵If you have love for one another, then everyone will know that you are my disciples."—*Good News Bible*.*

12. Shouldn't that be a description of Christian families as well as Christian churches? But, let us realize up front that that kind of love is not natural for sinful humans. We must have the indwelling of the Holy Spirit in order to experience it. Don't all Christians love each other?

1 John 4:8: ⁸Whoever does not love does not know God, for God is love.—*Good News Bible*.*

Romans 5:5: ⁵This hope does not disappoint us, for God has poured out his love into our hearts by means of the Holy Spirit, who is God's gift to us.—*Good News Bible*.*

Romans 8:9,11: ⁹But you do not live as your human nature tells you to; instead, you live as the Spirit tells you to—if, in fact, God's Spirit lives in you. Whoever does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him.... ¹¹If the Spirit of God, who raised Jesus from death, lives in you, then he who raised Christ from death will also give life to your mortal bodies by the presence of his Spirit in you.—*Good News Bible*.*

Do all Christians have God's Spirit in them?

13. The disciple John was probably the youngest of the twelve disciples who followed Jesus initially. In the beginning, John was proud, power-hungry, critical, and hot-tempered. (See Mark 3:17; Luke 9:54-55; *Desire of Ages* 295.) But, his time with Jesus was transformative; he became the beloved disciple and wrote more about love than anyone else.

All the disciples had serious faults when Jesus called them to His service. Even John, who came into closest association with the meek and lowly One, was not himself naturally meek and yielding. He and his brother were called "the sons of thunder." While they were with Jesus, any slight shown to Him aroused their indignation and combativeness. Evil temper, revenge, the spirit of criticism, were all in the beloved disciple. He was proud, and ambitious to be first in the kingdom of God. But day by day, in contrast with his own violent spirit, he beheld the tenderness and forbearance of Jesus, and heard His lessons of humility and patience. He opened his heart to the divine influence, [296] and became not only a hearer but a doer of the Saviour's words. Self was hid in Christ. He learned to wear the yoke of Christ and to bear His burden.—Ellen G. White, *Desire of Ages** 295.5.

14. Paul also had some very powerful things to say about love. What kind of relationships would we have in our families and in our churches if we all exhibited the traits described in 1 Corinthians 13:4-8? Could we actually live like that? Remember, that was *agape* love.
15. Very early in her career, Ellen White recognized how difficult it was to put together a truly Christian church. At one time, she was led to say: "If pride and selfishness were laid aside, five minutes would remove most difficulties."—Ellen G. White, *Early Writings** 119.

As human beings, our natures have been corrupted by sin. And, perhaps, the

greatest example of that corruption is the curse of selfishness. We seem to be born selfish; we can see this reality in small children, whose basic nature is want for themselves. "Me, me, me . . ." By the time we reach adulthood, this trait can manifest itself in some pretty terrible ways, especially in the home.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Tuesday, May 14.

16. One of the most exciting things about the gospel is that Jesus came to change all of that. (Ephesians 4:24) Could we as human beings actually learn to live without selfishness? (**1 John 2:6**; Philippians 2:3-5; 1 John 3:16-18)
17. Of course, God will forgive us of all our selfishness. But, how can we accept the help of the Holy Spirit to overcome those sins of selfishness?
18. What is needed to have that kind of oneness and unity in our homes and in our churches is humility and submission. These things are diametrically opposed to our natural tendencies which are constantly being promoted by Satan. Think of the natural animosities that we experience in life so commonly: Husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and slaves. (See Ephesians 5:21-6:9.)

The word *submit* (*Eph. 5:21*) means to place oneself humbly before another person on the basis of voluntary choice. This unique principle began with Christ (*Matt. 20:26-28; John 13:4, 5; Phil. 2:5-8*) and characterizes all those who are filled with His Spirit (*Eph. 5:18*). "Reverence for Christ" is what motivates people to submit in this way (*Eph. 5:21, NIV*). Mutuality in self-giving was, and still is, a revolutionary Christian teaching about social relationships. It brings to life the spiritual reality that all are one in Christ, there are no exceptions.—*Ibid.** for Wednesday, May 15.

19. Do we really have any idea of the level of submission required for the God of the universe to bow down and wash 12 pairs of dirty feet? Do we truly understand that the Father would have done the same thing?

Had God the Father come to our world and dwelt among us, humbling Himself, veiling His glory, that humanity might look upon Him, the history that we have of the life of Christ would not have been changed.... In every act of Jesus, in every lesson of His instruction, we are to see and hear and recognize God. In sight, in hearing, in effect, it is the voice and movements of the Father.—Ellen G. White, *That I May Know Him** 338.4.

20. Jesus submitted Himself even to experiencing death on the cross, the death of a despised, common criminal. Would the Father have done that? What does that say about Him?
21. Learning to exhibit submission and humility in the home is the proving ground of true Christianity. If we can learn to do that at home, the rest will be easier.

The most powerful sermon that can be given the unbelieving world in recommendation of our faith is a well-disciplined family. Children that are educated to habits of self-denial and self-control, and are taught to be courteous, kind, and affectionate, will make an impression upon minds that nothing else can. A family of children who are coarse, unruly, selfish, passionate, and disobedient, show to bad advantage, and is a bad recommendation to the truth [46] advocated by their parents.—Ellen G. White, *Pamphlet 123** 45.1.

The mission of the home extends beyond its own members. The Christian home is to be an object lesson, illustrating the excellence of the true

principles of life. Such an illustration will be a power for good in the world. **Far more powerful than any sermon that can be preached is the influence of a true home upon human hearts and lives.** As the youth go out from such a home, the lessons they have learned are imparted. Nobler principles of life are introduced into other households, and an uplifting influence works in the community.—Ellen G. White, *Ministry of Healing** 352.3. [Bold type is added.]

22. And speaking again of husbands and wives, parents and children, masters and slaves, Paul always dealt with the socially weaker member first. Why do you think that was?

Ephesians 5:22: Wives, submit to your husbands as to the Lord.—*Good News Bible*.*

Ephesians 6:1: Children, it is your Christian duty to obey your parents, for this is the right thing to do.—*Good News Bible*.*

Ephesians 6:5: Slaves, obey your human masters with fear and trembling; and do it with a sincere heart, as though you were serving Christ.—*Good News Bible*.*

Those with greater social power—husbands, parents, masters—are always addressed second. Each receives a directive quite uncommon to the culture. These directives must have astonished the believers of the first century. **They leveled the ground around the Cross** and opened the way for true oneness to be experienced in relationships.—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Wednesday, May 15. [Bold type is added.]

23. Are we willing to submit ourselves to living the kind of lives suggested by Jesus, Paul, and John and discussed in this lesson?

24. Look at some examples of relationships that can teach us important lessons.

- a. The parent-child commitment: Genesis 33:12-14; Exodus 2:1-10.
- b. Sibling commitment: Genesis 37:17-28.
- c. Family commitment: Ruth 1:16-18; 2:11-12,20; 3:9-13; 4:10,13.
- d. Marital commitment: Hosea 1:2-3,6,8; 3:1-3.

25. Each time we make a commitment to submit ourselves to our spouse or to the raising of a child, we are voluntarily giving up some of our independence and freedom. This requires true Christian love if it is going to be ultimately successful.

The first work of Christians is to be united in the family....

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.—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home** 37.4-5.

26. And what is the secret of family unity?

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.—*Ibid.** 179.2.

27. Have you truly considered what it means to be submissive to your spouse? And to fellow church members as Christ was submissive to His bride, us?

28. Read John 17:20-21. Do we really believe that it is possible to be so close to Jesus Christ that it is like the relationship between the Father and the Son? Would that lead the world to believe that Christianity, the religion of Jesus, is real? Would it be visible to others?
29. True unity and Christian love exhibited in a family are beautiful things to behold.
30. Think of ways in which Jesus was submissive. Each day He met with His Father in the early morning hours in prayer, and together they worked out His plans for the coming day. (John 8:29) If we really understood that level of submission, how would that impact us in our big discussions about ordination, gender roles, and headship?

Basically, marriage is a unique experiment to see if two potentially radically different people can operate as one. Mike Mason presents the struggle this way: “Even the closest of couples will inevitably find themselves engaged in a struggle of wills, for marriage is a wild, audacious attempt at an almost impossible degree of cooperation between two powerful centers of self-assertion. Marriage cannot help being a furnace of conflict, a crucible in which these two wills must be melted down and purified and made to conform.”—*The Mystery of Marriage* (Sisters, Oreg.: Multnomah Press, 1985), p. 167. In his brilliant chapter entitled “Submission,” Mason puts his finger on how this can happen. It sounds a bit like the rope parable. “ ‘He who is least among you,’ says Jesus, ‘he is the greatest’ (Luke 9:48). . . . Marriage at its best is a sort of contest in what might be called ‘one-downmanship,’ a backwards tug of war between two wills each equally determined not to win. That is really the only attitude which works in marriage because that is the way the Lord designed it.”—Page 167.—[as quoted in *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 95].

31. Surely, none of us who is familiar in the least bit with human history can deny that dominant individuals have abused more subordinate individuals in many ways down through the centuries. Some have even used the passage in Ephesians 5&6—where it tells wives to submit to their husbands, children to obey their parents, and bondservants to obey their earthly masters—as weapons in their arguments to maintain their superior positions. Do all those who use these arguments recognize that they are promoting Satan’s ideals?
32. In this lesson we have talked about principles and ideals which are in direct opposition to modern cultural tendencies.

Modern-day idolatry is expressed through self-worship in which absolute autonomy is the prized ethic: my importance, my desires, my preferences, my ambitions, and my way of folding clothes or doing dishes are all non-negotiables. “As long as I’m not hurting anyone else,” this ethic exclaims, “I can do what I want.”—*Ibid.** 96.

33. As Christian couples, are we prepared to start serious conversations about how we can level the playing field in our marriages? How might that help us in dealing with estranged children?
34. Remember that submission, love, and commitment need to be demonstrated not just in nice little words but also in hundreds of little actions every day. Are we prepared to do that? If not, will we ever fit into the kingdom of heaven?

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