

Family Seasons

Seasons of Parenting

Lesson #8 for May 25, 2019

Scriptures: Genesis 18:11; Jeremiah 31:25; Matthew 11:28; Psalm 127; Proverbs 22:6; 1 Samuel 3:10-14; Philippians 3:13.

1. There is no question about the fact that having a child has an enormous impact on the child's parents. Would that every child was carefully planned for! Consider some of the examples of parenting in the Bible. Think about Adam and Eve when they had their first child, Cain. Was God there to deliver Cain? Were Adam and Eve given any instructions about pregnancy, birth, and child-rearing? Think about Sarah in her 90s—and way past having monthly periods—finding that she was pregnant and giving birth to her own son, Isaac. God could easily have given Sarah her son many years earlier. So, why didn't He? The same thing could be asked about Hannah, the mother of Samuel. (1 Samuel 1:27)
2. And probably the most amazing story of all is the story of Mary, the mother of Jesus. Why do you think God chose a teenaged, unmarried woman living in a despised city to be His mother? Was it because of who Mary was? Or, was He trying to make a statement about environment? Or, both? God did not want Jesus to be accused of having unfair advantages!
3. And how should the church relate to those who have tried hard but **cannot seem to have their own children**? There are other examples in the Bible of those who wanted children but could not seem to produce any. Consider the story of Rachel.

Genesis 30:1: But Rachel had not borne Jacob any children, and so she became jealous of her sister and said to Jacob, "Give me children, or I will die."—American Bible Society. (1992). *The Holy Bible: The Good News Translation** (2nd ed., Genesis 30:1). New York: American Bible Society.

4. Why did God choose Elizabeth and her husband Zachariah to give birth to John the Baptist, the forerunner of Jesus? (Luke 1:5-25) Did this bring attention to that baby?
5. This lesson is going to be a painful one for those in our day who have wanted children but have not gotten any. What can the church do to reach out to such people and make the church itself seem a welcoming place? Some of them may choose to adopt children. And there are many ways in which people can get involved with children even if they have none of their own. They could be teachers, mentors for children, Sabbath school leaders, or any number of similar activities involving children. One can pick the age one prefers!
6. So, how should we relate to **Paul's advice** as recorded in 1 Corinthians 7:8-10,17?
1 Corinthians 7:8-10,17: ⁸Now, to the unmarried and to the widows I say that it would be better for you to continue to live alone as I do. ⁹But if you cannot restrain your desires, go ahead and marry—it is better to marry than to burn with passion. ¹⁰For married people I have a command which is not my own but the Lord's: a wife must not leave her husband....¹⁷ Each of you should go on living according to the Lord's gift to you, and as you were when God called you. This is the rule I teach in all the churches.—*Good News Bible.**
7. We are almost 2000 years closer to the second advent than Paul was! Should we all stop getting married? And stop having children? How do you feel about the world in which we live?
Is it a good idea to bring children into this environment?
8. Jesus, of course, never had children. Try to imagine what it would be like if some of the direct descendants of Jesus were still alive somewhere on this earth today. Would people want to

worship them? Wouldn't the Devil do everything he possibly could to turn them into wicked people? How would we relate to them in that case?

9. Another significant issue that the church needs to deal with is the case of **single parents**. Often, single parents are looked down upon because it is assumed that they have given birth out of wedlock. But, there are even biblical examples of times when that was not the case. Think of the story of Hagar. (Genesis 16:3-4; 21:17) During that 3½ year famine, Elijah was sent to Zarephath to help a single mother who was a widow. (1 Kings 17:9) How would our church today relate to a prophet of God living with a widow and her son?

From the day when she heard the angel's announcement in the home at Nazareth Mary had treasured every evidence that Jesus was the Messiah. His sweet, unselfish life assured her that He could be no other than the Sent of God. Yet there came to her also doubts and disappointments, and she had longed for the time when His glory should be revealed. **Death had separated her from Joseph, who had shared her knowledge of the mystery of the birth of Jesus. Now there was no one to whom she could confide her hopes and fears. The past two months had been very sorrowful.** She had been parted from Jesus, in whose sympathy she found comfort; she pondered upon the words of Simeon, "A sword shall pierce through thy own soul also" (Luke 2:35); she recalled the three days of agony when she thought Jesus lost to her forever; and with an anxious heart she awaited His return.—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages** 145.1. [Bold type is added.]

10. Being a single parent has many challenges. They range from the financial challenges to managing all of the other various responsibilities while still trying to get some sleep at night. The Bible is full of promises even to single parents. See Jeremiah 31:25; Matthew 11:28; Jeremiah 29:11; 32:27; Proverbs 3:5-6; and Isaiah 43:1-2.
11. James, the older stepbrother of Jesus wrote: "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble." (James 1:27, *NKJV**) How well is the Seventh-day Adventist Church doing in **reaching out to single parents, widows, and orphans**? Surely, it would be appropriate for the Seventh-day Adventist Church to welcome such people—no matter how they got into their situation—into church fellowship and help them in whatever ways possible.
12. There are many passages in Scripture celebrating the **joys of parenting**. For example, see Psalm 127:3-5. But, we need to recognize that parenting is always a brand-new experience. No child is exactly like any other child. Even parents who have had several children already find each new child to be a new challenge. There are many reasons for this; it may be because of their gender, their birth order, their natural temperaments, or a variety of other reasons.
13. God gave clear instructions to the children of Israel through Moses just before they entered the land of Canaan about how they should instruct their children.

Deuteronomy 6:4-9: "Israel, remember this! The LORD—and the LORD alone—is our God. ⁵Love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. ⁶Never forget these commands that I am giving you today. ⁷**Teach them to your children. Repeat them when you are at home and when you are away, when you are resting and when you are working.** ⁸**Tie them on your arms and wear them on your foreheads as a reminder.** ⁹**Write them on the doorposts of your houses and on your gates.**"—*Good News Bible*.* [Bold type is added.]

14. There are four very important recommendations in Deuteronomy 6: (1) We need to recognize the Lord as our God. (Deuteronomy 6:4) (2) We need to love Him fully from our hearts. (Deuteronomy 6:5) (3) We need to practice Bible study and treasure God's Word. (Deuteronomy 6:6) (4) We need to find the most effective ways to share those attitudes and practices with our children. (Deuteronomy 6:20-23)
15. The instruction in Deuteronomy 6 can be broken down into two important principles: (1) We need to talk to our children about God, and (2) We need to teach them about God. Thus, they need both formal instruction and informal instruction. In both the formal and the informal instruction, they need to understand our own relationship with God and why we think that is the most important aspect of our lives. Everyday events that happened to us can often be used as launching pads for teaching biblical principles.
16. The second main thing that we need to do as parents is the "bind-write" principle. (Deuteronomy 6:8-9) We not only need to teach our children, but also we need to show them by our actions and our attitudes both in our private and in our public lives why the biblical principles of Christianity are the most important thing in our lives. Ideally, we need to pass on to our children our love for God and our willingness to follow Him in all things.
17. One question that arises when discussing the discipline and teaching of children is whether or not **physical punishment** is appropriate. It has been said that "a pat on the back may help people if it's applied early enough, frequently enough, and low enough!"

Proverbs 22:15: Children just naturally do silly, careless things, but a good spanking will teach them how to behave.—*Good News Bible*.*

Proverbs 23:13-14: ¹³Don't hesitate to discipline children. A good spanking won't kill them. ¹⁴As a matter of fact, it may save their lives.—*Good News Bible*.*

Proverbs 29:15: Correction and discipline are good for children. If they have their own way, they will make their mothers ashamed of them.—*Good News Bible*.*

The Bible teaches parents to govern with kindness (*Eph. 6:4, Col. 3:21*) and to instruct children in righteousness (*Ps. 78:5, Prov. 22:6, Isa. 38:19, Joel 1:3*). As parents we ought to provide for our children (*2 Cor. 12:14*) and set a good example for them to follow (*Gen. 18:19, Exod. 13:8, Titus 2:2*). We are told to direct our households well (*1 Tim. 3:4, 5, 12*) and to discipline our children (*Prov. 29:15, 17*) while at the same time reflecting God's love (*Isa. 66:13, Ps. 103:13, Luke 11:11*).—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Wednesday, May 22.

18. Read Genesis 18:17-19, as follows, and 1 Samuel 3:10-14. These are two contrasting stories of parenting. Parents must learn to be not only good examples but also disciple makers. Let us **not make the mistakes that Eli and Samuel did**.

Genesis 18:17-19: ¹⁷And the LORD said to himself, "I will not hide from Abraham what I am going to do. ¹⁸His descendants will become a great and mighty nation, and through him I will bless all the nations. ¹⁹I have chosen him in order that he may command his sons and his descendants to obey me and to do what is right and just. If they do, I will do everything for him that I have promised."—*Good News Bible*.*

God called Abraham to be a teacher of His word, He chose him to be the father of a great nation, because He saw that Abraham would instruct his children and his household in the principles of God's law. And that which gave power to Abraham's teaching was the influence of his own life. His great

household consisted of more than a thousand souls, many of them heads of families, and not a few but newly converted from heathenism. Such a household required a firm hand at the helm. No weak, vacillating methods would suffice. Of Abraham God said, "I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him." Genesis 18:19. Yet his authority was exercised with such wisdom and tenderness that hearts were won. The testimony of the divine Watcher is, "They shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment." Genesis 18:19.—Ellen G. White, *Education** 187.2; *CC** 49.2; *OFC** 173.2; *RH*,* February 1, 1912, par. 7.

19. The Bible does not hesitate to point out mistakes made even by the saints. Isaac and Rebekah each had their favorite sons: Isaac preferred Esau, and Rebekah preferred Jacob. Unfortunately, Jacob, in turn, favored his son Joseph. (See Genesis 25:28; 37:3.) Although he was a spiritual leader of the entire nation, the priest Eli failed to correct his sons. (1 Samuel 3:10-14). His adopted child, Samuel, turned out to be much better; but, Samuel himself made many of the same mistakes with his children. (1 Samuel 8:1-6)
20. And the royal family of King David made a lot of mistakes. David himself committed adultery and ordered a murder to cover it up. Probably the wickedest king in that family line was King Manasseh who "rebuilt the pagan places of worship," "built altars for the worship of Baal," "made an image of the goddess Asherah," "worshiped the stars," "built altars in the Temple," "sacrificed his son as a burnt offering," "practised divination and magic and consulted fortunetellers and mediums," and "placed the symbol of the goddess Asherah in the Temple" in Jerusalem. (See 2 Kings 21:1-9, *GNB*.*)
21. But, not all in the Old Testament is bad news. Job had 20 children. All of them will, no doubt, be in heaven because of his example and his parenting skills.
22. Mordecai, the cousin of Esther, was a wonderful surrogate/adoptive father to her. But, would you want your daughter to do what Esther did? It is true that she saved her people at a time of crisis. However, as a faithful Jewish girl, she violated all the Jewish norms by marrying a heathen king! But, did she have any choice in the matter?
23. We need to remember, of course, that teachers are a kind of surrogate parents. Mentors of almost any kind can be surrogate parents. Adoptive parents are sometimes better than a child's original biological parents.
24. Earnest prayers are always appropriate when it comes to dealing with our children.

You should take time to talk and pray with your little ones, and you should allow nothing to interrupt that season of communion with God and with your children. You can say to your visitors, "God has given me a work to do, and I have no time for gossiping." **You should feel that you have a work to do for time and for eternity. You owe your first duty to your children.**—Ellen G. White, *Signs of the Times*,* July 22, 1889, par. 7; *The Adventist Home** 266.3-267.0.

Parents, you should commence your first lesson of discipline when your children are babes in your arms. Teach them to yield their will to yours. This can be done by bearing an even hand, and manifesting firmness. **Parents should have perfect control over their own spirits, and with mildness and yet firmness bend the will of the child until it shall expect nothing else but to yield to their wishes. Parents do not commence in season.** The first manifestation of temper is not subdued, and the children grow stubborn, which increases with their growth and strengthens with their strength.—Ellen G.

White, *Testimonies for the Church*,* vol. 1, 218.2-3 [Bold type is added.]

25. Children need to be worked with and influenced, as far as possible, for the right starting at a very young age. **And even when children seem to go their own way and care little about God, we need to keep praying. It is impossible to know what event or influence might occur to convince those children to come back.**

26. What does it really mean to be a child of God? What should we learn from that image?

One father, soon after his children were born, said the following: "I've learned two great theological truths within the first few years after my children were born. The first is the reality of free will; the second, the reality of sinful human nature." How might young children have taught him these truths?—*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Friday, May 24.

27. It is important to remember also that no matter how much you love your children, God loves them more. How can we teach and show that lesson to our children?

28. In many of the more affluent parts of the world, the Seventh-day Adventist Church would grow faster if we could just keep all of our children in the church even if we did no evangelism outside of our families! So, why are we losing so many of our children?

29. **Read Proverbs 22:6.** How do you understand this passage? Many have read it to mean that God has promised that if we are faithful parents, our children will remain faithful as well. Unfortunately, many parents have discovered that it does not always work like that. And the Devil probably works extra hard on children of godly parents in order to somehow diminish their influence on others around them.

What should a parent do when a child goes astray? Turn your children over to God in earnest prayer. **If anybody understands your pain, it is God, whose children, by the billions, have turned their backs on Him, the perfect Parent. You can support your prodigals with love and prayer and be ready to stand alongside them as they wrestle with God.**

Don't be too embarrassed to ask for support and prayer, don't blame yourself, and don't be so focused on the prodigal that you forget the rest of the family. Parenting a prodigal can divide your household; so, build a unified front with your spouse and set clear boundaries for your child. **Remember that God loves your child more than you do, look to a brighter future, and accept that your child is God's work in progress.**—*Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** for Thursday, May 23. [Bold type is added.]

30. How should Proverbs 22:6 be **translated**? It is probably the most frequently quoted verse in the Bible regarding parenting.

31. There are several things we can learn from this verse. First of all, no matter how one chooses to translate the verse, it does not mean that every wayward child is a result of bad parenting. What about the billions of God's children who have rejected Him?

32. Proverbs are pithy statements. They are brief, forceful, and express strong sentiments. So, this verse should be taken as a general principle about how early experiences will not be forgotten and may have long-term consequences.

33. We need to note some interesting points about the translation of Proverbs 22:6. In the traditional translation, the expression, *in the way he should go* does not really say that. The Hebrew only reads, "According to his way." So, what does *his way* mean? Is that to suggest that each person has a certain vocational propensity and they should be encouraged to go

in that direction? The author of the commentary suggested: “The choice of a lifework should be in line with the natural bent.”—*The SDA Bible Commentary*,* vol. 3, 1020.

34. Another issue is that the word translated *child* in the standard translation might actually refer to an “unmarried young adult.” Thus, some feel that the verse should read: “Train an adolescent in his own way, and when he is old he will not depart from it.” One medieval Jewish philosopher Ralbags (which is an acronym for the Rabbi Levi Ben Gershon) translated it: “Train a child according to his evil inclinations, and he will continue in his evil way throughout his life.” One might wonder why this understanding of the passage is not more widely translated in the versions. It is probably because it does not sound like something the Bible should be promoting!

“... Compare Prov. 19:27, ‘Stop listening to instruction, my son, and you will stray from the words of knowledge.’ ”—In Gary D. Practico and Miles V. Van Pelt, *Basics of Biblical Hebrew Grammar* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), p. 163.—[as quoted in *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide** 108].

35. There is one other very interesting variation on this verse that we should mention. A group of Jewish scribes and scholars known as the Masoretes preserved the Hebrew text of the Old Testament and copied it very carefully between the years 600 and 1000 A.D. They were very thorough and careful students of the Hebrew text and made another suggestion. It turns out that there are two ways to spell the word *Enoch*. There was one standard way the name *Enoch* was spelled and one shortened or defective way. That defective spelling is found in Genesis 25:4; Numbers 26:5; and Proverbs 22:6—our verse. So, it is possible that in Proverbs 22:6 the author was trying to say something about Enoch.
36. So, what does this verse say about Enoch? It turns out that the word for *train* as in *train up a child* has exactly the same spelling as the shortened version of the word *Enoch*. Of course, the name *Enoch* is a noun while the word *train* is a verb. But, if you choose to substitute the name *Enoch*, you might end up with a verse that says something like: “ ‘[Use the example of] Enoch for a child according to his way [i. e., the way of Enoch]; even when he is old [like Methuselah] he will not depart from it’ (*Proverbs 22:6*). ”—*Ibid.** 109. [Content in brackets and italic type are in the Bible Study Guide.] In this lesson we do not have the time or the space to deal with the intricacies of how this all happened; but, in light of the Masoretic suggestion, the verse could read: “ ‘Raise your children in the Enoch way, and they will stay faithful till an old age like Methuselah.’ ”—*Ibid.**
37. Enoch, of course, was the man who walked so faithfully with God that he was taken to heaven without tasting death. And his son, Methuselah, lived longer than any other known person. So, how can we as Christian adults in the 21st century make “walking with God” so attractive to our children that they will choose to walk in that way themselves?
38. Some of us may feel like the Christian speaker when he had finished a major writing project and gave thanks to his family for their support: “I want to thank my wife, who lovingly helped,... and my children, who lovingly hindered.” So, when it comes time to get a major work done, children may be a blessing and a trial.
39. So, what have you learned from your children?

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Last Modified: April 20, 2019

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