

A Family of Families



SABBATH—DECEMBER 31

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Genesis 2:18-25; Genesis 27:1–28:5; Matthew 10:35-37; John 17:11, 21, 22; Acts 9:17; Acts 21:8, 9; Romans 16:1; 1 Corinthians 4:14, 15; Galatians 4:5; 1 John 4:8, 16.

MEMORY VERSE: “So you are no longer strangers and outsiders. You are citizens together with God’s people. You are members of God’s family. You are a building that is built on the apostles¹ and prophets. They are the foundation [basis]. Christ Jesus himself is the most important stone in the building” (Ephesians 2:19, 20, NIV).

MAURICE AND SARA WERE NEWLY BAPTIZED ADVENTISTS. They lived in an area filled with crime. They told the pastor they wanted to move to a safe place closer to the church. Then their two daughters could attend church school. The pastor shared their hopes with the church. Before long, a church member found an empty apartment near the church. It was just what the family had been hoping for. But their hope fell when a large deposit was required. Telephones rang. By the next day, donations from church members helped Maurice and Sara make the deposit and the first month’s rent. Church members cleaned both the old and new apartments. They also moved Maurice and Sara. Tired but filled with joy, Maurice stood in front of the church members the next Sabbath. He was so thankful. He said, “I’m so glad I have a family!”

A LOOK AT THIS WEEK’S LESSON: Our family is both our households and God’s church. Through these families, God wants us to experience His self-giving love.

Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 7.

¹apostles—Jesus’ disciples who preached the gospel after Jesus returned to heaven.

SUNDAY—JANUARY 1**FAMILY ROOTS (Genesis 2:18-25).**

God brought together Adam and Eve in marriage. In so doing, He formed the first family.



The first family.

What purpose for the family is clear in Genesis 2:18-25?

“ ‘It is not good for the man to be alone’ ” (Genesis 2:18, NIV). Companionship (fellowship) is one of the first purposes of families. The Bible uses the words “family” and “household” to describe social groups made up of relatives and sometimes helpers, all living together for companionship. Together, families care for the needs of each person and fight off loneliness. (Compare² Leviticus 25:47-49; Ruth 2:1-20; Psalm 68:5, 6.)

A special companionship: With the marriage of Adam and Eve, God gave a very special kind of companionship. He planned husbands and wives to experience a special union He called

“one flesh” (Genesis 2:24). To the married couple, He entrusted another of His purposes for families—the raising of children (Genesis 1:28).

What deeper meaning of the family comes from God as a Person and the creation of humanity³ in His image? Genesis 1:26-28. (Compare John 17:11, 21, 22; 1 John 4:8, 16.)

In Christ’s words, we can see the unity and loving relationship within the Godhead.⁴ Think of the meaning and purpose this gives to life in our separate households. In their own way, our households can show the self-giving love seen within the Trinity (Godhead)! No wonder family becomes an important symbol in the New Testament for the church. The church is the household of faith (Galatians 6:10).

Companionship is basic to family life. How much time do you spend being in companionship with other family members? What could you give up so you could spend more time with your family?

MONDAY—JANUARY 2**JESUS’ SUPPORT FOR FAMILIES (Matthew 19:4-6).**

What do the following verses tell us about Jesus’ attitude (feeling) toward family relationships?⁵

²compare—show how things are the same.

³humanity—all the people of the world.

⁴Godhead—God the Father, God the Son (Jesus), and God the Holy Spirit.

⁵relationships—the connections we have with people.

Matthew 19:4-6 _____

Mark 7:9-13 _____

John 5:17, 18 _____

John 19:26, 27 _____

Jesus supported God's plan for families. He left no doubt about God's plan for marriage, especially when the Pharisees⁶ asked Him about divorce. The fifth commandment about honoring parents was on Jesus' mind when He scolded the Pharisees. They were encouraging adult children to give an offering, money that should have been spent on their aging parents. Probably Jesus' greatest support for the parent-child relationship came when He talked about God as His Father. On the cross, Jesus showed love and care for His mother. He made sure the woman who had taken care of Him as

a child would receive good care in the home of His trusted disciple, John.

Some things Jesus said about families may need to be explained clearly. Read Matthew 10:35-37; Mark 3:32-35; Luke 9:59-62; and Luke 14:26. Why do you think Jesus said these things?

Jesus created people to be in families. He did not change His mind about families during His earthly ministry (work). Just as He planned at Creation, the Son of God (Jesus) upheld families for training, support, and strength. But we need to remember that loyalty to God is more important than loyalty to families.

God calls us to be responsible to Him in both our church and family experience. How can we divide our energy, time, and resources between church and family? What dangers are there for those who neglect their family because they are so busy with church activities?

TUESDAY—JANUARY 3

DIFFERENT KINDS OF FAMILIES (Hosea 3:1-3).

Think about the different kinds of families in Bible times: Genesis 27:1–28:5; Ruth 1:22; Ruth 2:23; Jeremiah 16:2; Hosea 1:2, 3, 6, 8; Hosea 3:1-3. What others can you think of?

⁶Pharisees—religious leaders of Jesus' day who believed a person must keep God's law to be saved.



Ruth and Naomi were a family.

Isaac and Rebekah lived with their adult son, Jacob, and his married twin brother, Esau. The widows Naomi and Ruth joined together as mother and daughter-in-law for protection. Jeremiah was single. As a single parent, Hosea took care of his three children alone before he re-united with Gomer. Other Bible families include Lazarus, Martha, and Mary (brother and sisters; John 11:1-3, 20) and Aquila and Priscilla were married with no children (Acts 18:2, 18; 1 Corinthians 16:19). The family of grandmother Lois, her daughter, Eunice, and grandson, Timothy, lived together in Lystra. Timothy's Greek father may have separated from the family as an unbeliever (Acts 16:1; 2 Timothy 1:5; 1 Corinthians 7:15).

Accepting different kinds of families: God loves and cares about different kinds of families. This should give much encouragement to our world today. This should also help us to better love many different kinds of families within God's church.

What basic values for family living

does the Bible teach? Genesis 2:24, 25; Exodus 20:14; Leviticus 18:22; Proverbs 5:18-20; Matthew 19:6; Romans 1:26, 27; 1 Corinthians 7:3-5; Hebrews 13:4.

God's kind acts throughout the history of salvation show His mercy⁷ toward humans in a sinful world. In this world, God's plan for families is rarely followed. But there are basic values that often appear in the Bible. These values are to protect, restore,⁸ and raise up God's gift of sex to the human family. These values teach us that sexual closeness is a good example of self-giving love in the marriage of a man and a woman only. Many kinds of families which do not practice normal male-female sexual relationships in marriage spoil God's plan for marriage and dishonor humanity.

Is there anyone in your church living in a family different from your own? How can you show these people love and support?

WEDNESDAY—JANUARY 4

ONE IS A WHOLE NUMBER (Luke 2:36-38).

When we count the number of present households in the family of God, we find that the number of households with single adults is large and growing. When society and the

⁷mercy—kindness we do not deserve.

⁸restore—make something as it was in the beginning before sin appeared.

church hold up marriage as part of social living, these single adults have a hard time feeling normal and whole. Often they do not feel that they belong.

Think about the situations of the following single adults. How did they contribute to God's cause? Elijah (1 Kings 17:1, 2; 2 Kings 2:11); Anna (Luke 2:36-38); John the Baptist (Matthew 11:7-11); Philip's daughters (Acts 21:8, 9). What other Bible characters remained single?

The choice to live as a single person: Many people are single for only a short time. For others, being single is a positive lifetime choice. These singles recognize that many get married, but that God also gives His sons and daughters the choice to be single. For others, being single is the result of being unable to find suitable partners.

Paul supported marriage. But he personally believed being single would be better because of the work to be done for Christ. This was especially true if persons had the gift for being single and felt God was leading them to be single. The fellowship of the church must include both single people and married people. Because of the choices they make and challenges they face, we need to understand and support single people. We should not make single people feel less important than married couples.

A person's well-being and self-worth should not be related to whether one is single or married.

Instead, well-being and self-worth should be related to the person's faith in Christ. A person who has Christ is a complete person (Colossians 2:10).



A person who has Christ is a complete person.

How can you relate to the single people in your church in a positive manner? How can you support them in their present situations? If you are single, how can you relate to the married people in your church in a positive manner?

THURSDAY—JANUARY 5

FAMILY OF FAMILIES (John 20:17; Acts 9:17).

Discover the family symbol in the following verses describing life in the church: John 20:17; Acts 9:17; Romans 16:1; 1 Corinthians 4:14, 15; Galatians 4:5; 1 Timothy 5:2.

The church is to be a good exam-

ple of the peaceful, united, loving relationship between the members of the Godhead. “Birth”, “adoption”, “mother”, “father”, “sister”, and “brother” are family words. These words give a whole new way of talking about our relationship with God and about our relationship with others.

A pattern (example) for the church: The Holy Spirit uses common family relationships to describe a church that celebrates new births, accepts differences within the church, supports strengths, and encourages people to grow. If the word “family” calls up warm feelings for us, we will be quick to accept this view of the church. Sadly for some, family means painful memories. For these people, other examples of the church may be better. But God is a God of relationships. He created people with the ability to have relationships. Family may fail us; but in His church He gives examples of rest, healing, and experiences that are much better than family love (read Psalm 27:10).

How does the idea of the church as a family (Galatians 6:10; Ephesians 2:10) include everybody?

The church as a family helps us to think about the sense of belonging and the attitude (feeling) of neighborliness found in good family relationships. Many people have received Christ as their personal Savior. They come as families to church. But others attend alone. In a way, their fami-

lies are with them because each person has been influenced by their family experience. Each person always will be part of a family somewhere. Church is a family of families. The first Christians broke bread “from house to house.” But they were one church (Acts 2:46, 47). First Corinthians 12 shows the importance of encouraging and supporting each person in the church.

How is your experience of family at church almost the same as or different from your present family or your childhood family? Think of a Christian characteristic⁹ in your home now that could make a difference in your church family. What one Christian characteristic that is in your church family would you like to bring to your family at home?

FRIDAY—JANUARY 6

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Read Ellen G. White, “The Eden Home a Pattern [Example],” *The Adventist Home*, pp. 25–28; “Who Are My Brethren [Brothers]?” *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 321–327.

Unclean living rooms: “The churches of Revelation 2 and 3 show us that churches are not homes where everything is always picked up and ready for guests. Churches are messy family rooms. When we enter

⁹characteristic—what the character is made of, such as patience or laziness.

a person's house unexpectedly, we sometimes receive many apologies. John does not apologize. Things in the churches are out of order. But that is what happens to churches people go to. These churches are not show rooms. They are living rooms. If the persons living in the churches are sinners, there are going to be dirty clothes on the floor, handprints on the woodwork, and mud on the carpet. Jesus continues to call sinners and not the righteous (holy) to repentance.¹⁰ There is no sign that He will stop calling sinners. So churches are going to be an embarrassment to fastidious¹¹ people and an insult to self-righteous (holy) people.”—Adapted



Churches are like messy living rooms.

from Eugene H. Peterson, *Living the Message* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), p. 71.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. As a class, discuss how the church should relate to those who are living in a family relationship that does not follow the Bible. How do we show these people Christ's love and acceptance in a way that doesn't excuse their sinful actions?
2. For singles to have a sense of belonging can be hard in a culture that supports marriage as normal. What can you as a class do to reach out to singles in your own church? How can you show them they are an important part of the church family?

SUMMARY: Family is God's idea. He formed the human family to teach us that He is a God of relationships. He blesses separate families and the church as a family of families. His blessing shows His self-giving love.

¹⁰repentance—being sorry for your sins, wanting to stop sinning, and turning away from your sins.

¹¹fastidious—very difficult to please; fussy; particular.