

Families of Faith



SABBATH—MARCH 4

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: John 1:10-13; John 3:5-7; Acts 10:1-28, 34, 35; 1 Corinthians 2:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:21, 22; 1 John 5:1.

MEMORY VERSE: “Let us keep on running the race marked out for us. Let us keep looking to Jesus. He is the author of faith. He also makes it [faith] perfect. He paid no attention to the shame of the cross. He suffered there because of the joy he was looking forward to. Then he sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (Hebrews 12:1, 2, NIV).

“THIS GOOD NEWS OF THE KINGDOM WILL BE PREACHED IN THE WHOLE WORLD. It [the good news] will be a witness¹ to all nations” (Matthew 24:14, NIV). We live in the early twenty-first century. For this reason, we have the opportunity to see this prophecy in Matthew 24:14 being fulfilled in a way that people from the past could not. The gospel is spreading into new lands and new cultures. So the gospel meets with different traditions² and practices. Some of the traditions and practices might fit nicely with the truths God has given to us about families. But other traditions and practices might not fit with God's truths.

So, wherever the gospel is preached and lived, Christian families face cultural challenges all the time. The great news is that the power of the gospel gives us light, comfort, and strength to deal with these challenges. The gospel also helps us to be families of faith.

A LOOK AT THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Families face many cultural pressures. The power of the gospel can let them deal with those pressures victoriously.

Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 11.

¹witness—someone or something that tells others about God.

²traditions—long-held customs.

SUNDAY—MARCH 5**“HOLD ON TO WHAT IS GOOD”
(1 Thessalonians 5:21, 22, NIV).**

As the gospel goes around the world, Christians face different practices. Many of these practices deal with family and social relationships. One of the great questions for Christian missionaries is how they should deal with different cultural practices.

What can we learn from Acts 10:1-28, 34, 35 about our need to overcome our own prejudices³ when dealing with other cultures?



God was helping Peter to get over his prejudices.

Christ died for the sins of every person everywhere. Many people do not know that Christ died for them. We are to tell people that Christ died for them and invite them to accept Jesus. God loves everyone, so Christians are

called to treat everyone with love and give them a chance to accept Christ.

What did early Christian missionaries decide to do about teaching the gospel to other cultures? What principle⁴ can we learn from these verses? Acts 15:19, 20, 28, 29; 1 Corinthians 2:2; 1 Thessalonians 5:21, 22.

Every culture shows the sinful condition of the people within it. But cultures may also have beliefs that follow the Bible. Some of these beliefs are even useful to the cause of the gospel. The importance of close relationships in family and community in many parts of the world is a belief that follows the Bible. Christians can support and strengthen such beliefs.

At the same time, God's truth must not be covered up. Church history sadly shows that when Christian truth surrenders to a culture's beliefs that are not found in the Bible, false doctrines⁵ are made. Satan claims to be the god of this world. He happily spreads confusion. But Jesus has saved this world. His Holy Spirit guides His followers into all truth (John 16:13).

How much of your faith is influenced by your culture? How much of your faith is influenced by the Bible? How can you learn to see the difference between the Bible and your culture? Be prepared to discuss your answers in class.

³prejudices—hating people because they are different from us.

⁴principle—a basic rule.

⁵doctrines—church beliefs.

MONDAY—MARCH 6**THE POWER OF CULTURE ON FAMILY (Genesis 18:17-19).**

There are many different kinds of families. But all families can help build a strong society. Many cultural traits of different societies are tied to family. For example, in one old culture, a man's responsibility was to eat the corpse of his dead parents. In another old culture, a man who wanted a bride had to bring her father a gift of shrunken heads from a rival (enemy) tribe. Even in modern times, ideas about children, courtship, divorce, marriage, and parents are very different from culture to culture. As we spread our message to these different cultures, we have to learn how to relate to these cultures in ways that will not make us betray our beliefs and cause unnecessary problems. At the same time, we have to be very careful about cultural influences on our own families.

In what ways did culture influence family life in the following examples? What principles can we learn from these examples?

Genesis 16:1-3 _____

Genesis 35:1-4 _____

⁶vacuum—an empty space.

Ezra 10 _____

1 Kings 11:1 _____

None of us live in a vacuum.⁶ All of us and our families are influenced by the culture in which we live. Our responsibility as Christians is to live within our culture the best we can but to keep away from cultural things that do not follow the Bible.

What things in your culture are helpful to family life and agree with the Bible? What things are not? How can you best follow your faith and your culture without giving up important Bible truths?

TUESDAY—MARCH 7**SUPPORTING FAMILIES THROUGH TIMES OF CHANGE (Genesis 12:1-5).**

Change is upsetting to families, no matter what culture they live in. Some

change is related to growing up or going through the life cycle. Often change is unexpected, such as deaths, bad experiences, war, illnesses, family moves, or career failures. Many families face economic and social changes in their communities and countries. Other changes are related to the culture.



Family members can support each other when life changes.

Below are some examples of great changes people faced. Using your imagination, put yourself in their place. How did changes influence family life? How would you have survived? In what ways might you have reacted differently?

- Abraham, Sarah, and Lot (Genesis 12:1-5)
- Hadassah (Esther 2:7-9)
- Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (Daniel 1:1-21)

⁷tradition—a long-held custom of people.

With change comes loss and worry about one's future. Change can encourage people to better understand spiritual things. Or change can cause them worry. Satan takes advantage of change. He hopes to introduce doubt and distrust in God. The promises of the Bible, the help of family and friends, and God's leading helped many men and women of faith deal successfully with great changes.

Do you know someone (or even a whole family) who is going through an upsetting change? What can you do to encourage them?

WEDNESDAY—MARCH 8

HAVING OUR PARENTS' FAITH (John 1:12, 13).

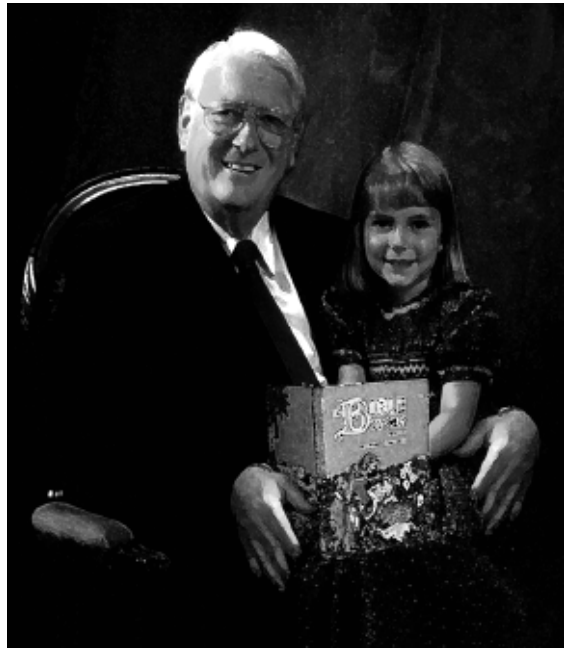
What crisis of faith developed in Israel after Joshua and his co-worker died? Judges 2:7-13.

Studies are being done on how parents have taught their beliefs to their children. These studies show that people who start a church are very loyal to their church's beliefs. The studies also show that many of their children, grandchildren, and great-grandchildren will forget the principles behind these beliefs. They stay in church only out of habit. Then the habit becomes tradition.⁷ There is no more loyalty like the loyalty of the people who started the church.

Many people say that God has no grandchildren, only children. What do you think that means? Read John 1:12, 13; John 3:7; 1 John 5:1.

A common method for teaching about Christ through long generations of Christianity has been for older family members to share their beliefs with young family members. But learning what one's parents believe or what the church believes is not personal faith. Being a Christian is more than belonging to a church that has a set of beliefs. True faith is not something passed on from person to person. Each one needs to know Christ for himself or herself. Parents can do only so much. The church and parents need to do all they can to make young people want to choose Christ. But in the end, people are saved or lost for the gospel one at a time.

Joe had been an atheist.⁸ He joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church as an adult after a powerful conversion experience. He married an Adventist woman and had a few children. They raised the children as Adventists. One day, Joe was thinking about the spiritual condition of his children. He said, "Oh, if only my children would have the experience I had!" If you had been there, what would you have said to Joe?



Older family members can share their faith with young family members.

THURSDAY—MARCH 9

TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY RUNNERS⁹ (2 Corinthians 5:18-21).

In his popular Bible translation *The Message*, Eugene Peterson uses the word "gospel." The good news about Jesus is really the message the world needs today. God asks Christian families to experience the message together and to share it in whatever culture they live.

How would you summarize the message (gospel) using the following verses? Matthew 28:5-7; John 3:16; Romans 1:16, 17; 1 Corinthians 2:2; 2 Corinthians 5:18-21.

⁸atheist—a person who does not believe in God.

⁹runners—people who spread the gospel.

The earliest news the disciples spread everywhere was of Jesus' resurrection.¹⁰ Christian families today join a long line of runners. They preach, "He is risen, as he said" (Matthew 28:7). The fact that Jesus really rose from the dead proves that everything else Jesus said about Himself is true. Jesus' resurrection also proves true what He said about God and God's love for sinners, about forgiveness, and about the promise of eternal¹¹ life by faith in Him (Jesus).



Excited about the gospel: The Bible shows us the gospel's great influence on the lives of Jesus' early followers. They opened their homes for Bible study. They prayed and ate together. They shared money and other things. And they took care of each other. Whole households accepted the gospel. Were they suddenly people without fault? No. Were there some

disagreements among them? Yes. But somehow these followers of Christ were different. They accepted their need for God and for each other. They made unity and harmony very important at home and at church. They tried to fulfill the prayer of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane (John 17:20-23). They witnessed¹² to each other and to unbelievers with courage. They even put their lives at risk for their beliefs.

We must be like these early followers. Even in today's world, people who are excited about something still have a chance to tell others about it. The Holy Spirit wants to fill human hearts with excitement about the gospel. When the good news really becomes as good in our hearts as it is within the Bible, we will be so excited that we will not stop sharing it with others.

What changes might need to be made in your own family that could help it be a better example of the message God has asked us to share?

FRIDAY—MARCH 10

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Ellen G. White, "In the Court of Babylon," *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 479–490; *Gospel Workers*, pp. 325–332; "Rejoicing in the Lord," *Steps to Christ*, pp. 115–126.

¹⁰resurrection—Jesus' return to life after dying on the cross.

¹¹eternal—forever; without beginning or end; lasting forever.

¹²witnessed—told other people about Christ; lived a life that showed they belonged to Christ.

God plays no favorites: “The religion of Christ uplifts the receiver to a higher level of thought and action. But at the same time, Christ’s religion presents all people as objects of the love of God, because of His Son’s sacrifice. At the feet of Jesus, the rich and the poor, the learned and the ignorant, meet together as equals. All earthly differences and social classes (groups) are forgotten as we look upon Him. Our sins have nailed Him to the cross. His love, mercy,¹³ and humble sacrifice put to shame human pride, false self-worth, and social class. Pure religion shows its heavenly principles in bringing together all who are made holy through the truth. All meet as blood-bought souls. They are equally dependent upon Him who has saved them for God.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 330.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. As a class, discuss your answers to Sunday’s lesson.
2. What principles can we find from the Ellen G. White quote above that would completely change our family lives?
3. How well has your local church done in encouraging young believers? What can you as a class do to help the church encourage its young people?

SUMMARY: The earliest evangelists¹⁴ understood that God plays no favorites with people. The gospel belongs to everyone. Every culture must hear the gospel simply presented without cultural influences. The gospel introduces great and sure changes in the hearts and lives of persons and families.

¹³mercy—kindness we do not deserve.

¹⁴evangelists—preachers who travel, preaching the gospel wherever they go.