

Living *With* Lambs



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 16:1; Deut. 8:5; Pss. 30:1-9; 50:10-12; 127:3; Prov. 3:11, 12; Mic. 6:8.*

Memory Text: “He tends his flock like a shepherd: He gathers the lambs in his arms and carries them close to his heart; he gently leads those that have young” (*Isaiah 40:11, NIV*).

The Week at a Glance: To have children is to be a parent-steward. And God, in His Word, gives parent-stewards instruction on how to execute their responsibilities faithfully.

Children, indeed, are gifts from God; outside of life itself (both temporal and eternal), they are the most wonderful of all gifts. Yet, the greater the gift, the greater the responsibility upon those who receive the gift. Thus, a precious opportunity, and solemn calling, is open to all parents to share with their children the simple good news of Jesus' love and life-giving power. However important it is to impart to our children the good news of Jesus and what He has done for us all, children grasp truth first, not so much from what the Bible teaches but from what their parents live. This week we'll look at some of the instructions the Gift-Giver gave to those whom He gave such precious gifts.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 28.*

A Unique Stewardship

When God created the first human couple, He gave them dominion over the earth. Along with this stewardship, they were privileged to bear and rear children. The Bible considers children to be gifts from God. Actually, children belong to Him; parents are, therefore, accountable to God for the way they treat these offspring. “Children are the heritage of the Lord, and we are answerable to Him for our management of His property.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 159.

What do you think it means for children to be God’s “property”? Study Psalms 50:10-12; 127:3; Isaiah 43:1, 7; and 1 Peter 2:9 as you answer. How does this idea change the way we should perceive children? What do these texts tell parents about their responsibility and obligations toward their children?

Everything is God’s by right of creation and by redemption, as well. Though Satan claimed to be the rightful ruler of this planet after sin, God reclaimed His rulership of the world through Christ. This reclaiming includes everyone, even children. Parents must always remember whose children their children really are. This is certainly one case where no one wants to be deemed an “unjust steward” (*Luke 16:8*).

When you think of parenting as a unique stewardship, what insights come to mind? Why is this kind of stewardship different from every other kind? What might faithful stewardship of children mean? *1 Cor. 4:2*.

Good managers ask advice from the owner of the property they manage. Godly parents likewise seek through prayer and Bible study to be guided as they rear their children. Manoah and his wife asked the right questions, “How shall we order the child [Samson], and how shall we do unto him?” (*Judges 13:12*).

Momentous Decisions

Throughout time, couples have generally expected to be parents. Children continued the family line, provided companionship, helped with work, and cared for aging parents. Like Rachel, women often connected their sense of value to bearing children (*Gen. 30:1*).

Consider these comments from married couples about to have a baby. Which ones represent good reasons for bearing a child? Which do not, and why not?

- ① “We thought a child would help cement our marriage.”
- ② “I’ve always wanted a baby since the time I played with dolls.”
- ③ “We love each other and want to share that love with a child.”
- ④ “We weren’t trying to get pregnant; it was an accident, really.”

Becoming parents is an important choice. The decisions about whether to bear or adopt children and how many to have should be thoughtful ones. What purpose would a child serve? Will God be honored if a new life is brought into the world? Do we have the emotional and physical resources and the long-term commitment to provide for all the needs of a child (*1 Tim. 5:8*)? Rearing children can be difficult in troubled times (*Mark 13:17*).

On the other hand, children have a way of helping families to be more affectionate, patient, and selfless. Few joys compare with joining the Creator in the formation of a new person and experiencing the wonder of life alongside a growing child.

What impact did infertility have on some Bible families? What do you think might have been done differently to ease these situations? *Gen. 16:1, 2; 30:1-9; 1 Sam. 1:1-20.*

Many couples struggle to understand why God withholds children from them. Much soul-searching, quarreling, and domestic turmoil often result. We should not judge such couples then or now too hastily. Sensitivity toward couples without children spares them from unfeeling remarks. They should receive accurate information and counsel when they ask for it and be given privacy to decide the best course to follow.

Lessons From the Heavenly Parent

The Bible describes God as a Parent. Jesus called God “Father” and introduced Him in winsome ways (*Matt. 5:16; 6:9, 14, 15, 18*). God wants to be Father to each of us personally. This picture of God complements the view of those who grew up in loving homes, while those who had difficulty relating to a parent may have trouble trusting Him. All who come to God, however, are treated with the care that only this Parent, the most attached and nurturing of all fathers, can give. Before we parent our children, we must be *parented* by Him.

What parental responsibilities are seen in God’s relationship with His people? What guidance for parenting today does this provide?

God as Parent	Responsibility	Guidance for Our Parenting
Deut. 1:31, John 6:33-35, Phil. 4:19		
Ps. 32:8, Isa. 54:13, Hos. 11:3		
Deut. 8:5; Prov. 3:11, 12; Heb. 12:5-7		

God’s love especially helps parents who have invested heavily in their children only to have them reject values that are dear. “ ‘When Israel was a child, I loved him. . . . But the more I called Israel, the further they went from me’ ” (*Hos. 11:1, 2, NIV*). God experienced all the emotions parents know when teenagers ignore counsel, behave in disappointing ways, or turn their backs on home. He values human freedom. He can guide parents to know how or whether to pursue a wayward one or to acknowledge an adult child’s decision and wait, as did the father of the prodigal son (*Luke 15:11-32*).

How is God’s attitude toward those who reject Him helpful to parents in dealing with wayward children? In what way does knowing that He knows the pain of rejection bring comfort and encouragement to troubled parents?

Doing What Is Good for Children

“He has showed you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (*Mic. 6:8, RSV*).

How should parents use these principles in regard to how they raise their children?

Ellen White elevated the importance of *kindness* and *firmness* in dealing with children: “The combined influence of authority and love will make it possible to hold firmly and kindly the reins of family government.”—*The Adventist Home*, p. 308. Current parenting research shows the significance of *control* and *support* to the development of emotionally healthy, well-functioning children. *Support* refers to demonstrations of warmth, affection, and sense of belonging that convey the respect of parents for children. *Control* has to do with parents providing structure, regulation, boundaries, and restraints in their children’s lives that help children respect themselves and others. “Kindness” and “support,” “firmness” and “control” express qualities within the biblical concepts of Micah 6:8.

Evaluate the parenting practices in these families: **Jacob** (*Gen. 37:3, 4*), **Manoah and his wife** (*Judg. 14:1-3*), **Eli** (*1 Sam. 2:22-25, 3:13*). **How could parenting with both firmness and kindness have made a difference? What practical changes would be necessary in order to incorporate both?**

Optimal parenting involves an abundance of warmth, affection, and affirmation, as well as appropriate limits, with realistic expectations appropriate to the child’s age. Rules are few, consequences are clear, and there is follow-through on consequences. In homes where firmness and kindness are found together, the likelihood that children will adopt their parents’ values is increased. They also will develop morally in keeping with their ages and be socially responsible and caring in relationships with others.

Shepherding a Child's Heart

Research confirms what many parents and teachers know already—children do have an active spiritual life. They believe God is important in their lives. Jesus honored children and taught us about their spiritual development.

How did Jesus relate to children? What did He say regarding their faith? *Matt. 18:2-5; Mark 9:36, 37, 41.*

Jesus affirmed the faith of children. This faith can be cultivated by the emotional security caring parents provide. If it is safe to ask any question, to talk about any topic at home, then children will learn to be comfortable talking anything over with God. When home is a caring place where one's needs are met, when parents are both physically and emotionally available to children, the young readily learn that God can be counted on to care for them. When children are made aware of how precious they are to their caregivers, it will help them to understand that God values them too.

What was Christ's warning to those who would offend children or cause them to sin? *Matt. 18:5, 6; Mark 9:42.*

Attitudes or actions toward a child that emotionally or physically harm him or her make it hard for the young person to believe in or trust in God. When sexual abuse of a child takes place, especially by a parent, betrayal goes to the deepest places of the soul. What follows is an often-lifelong struggle to relate to the perfect love of God or to the affection of a mate. An experience with the grace of God; life in a healing, accepting environment; and the guidance of trained counselors have enabled many such individuals to cope with these scars.

How does your relationship with the heavenly Shepherd influence the shepherding of your *flock*? What changes would you like to make in your approach to your child or to the children with whom you live or work?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “Misconception of the Mother’s Work,” *The Adventist Home*, pp. 244–247; “Discipline and Its Administration,” *Child Guidance*, pp. 221–268.

Younger members of the Lord’s family. “Your children are the younger members of the Lord’s family—brothers and sisters entrusted to your care by your heavenly Father for you to train and educate for heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, p. 251.

One such correction enough for a lifetime. “Whipping may be necessary when other resorts fail, yet she [the parent] should not use the rod if it is possible to avoid doing so. But if milder measures prove insufficient, punishment that will bring the child to its senses should in love be administered. Frequently one such correction will be enough for a lifetime, to show the child that he does not hold the lines of control.”—Page 250.

Discussion Questions:

1 In the previous passage “Whipping may be necessary . . .” list the principles found there regarding child discipline. What would you like to do differently in your relationship with your child?

2 In your church are there children of single parents or children from homes in which there has been some recent turmoil? If so (and where appropriate), why not plan some activities in which your class can help these children?

Summary: Children are younger members of the Lord’s family. As responsible stewards, Christian couples seek God’s guidance in the decision regarding whether to be parents and in the number of children they can appropriately care for. God supplies an abundance of instruction in His Word for His parent-stewards. His own providing, teaching, and correcting of His people offer important instruction.

Breaking Ties With Satan

by VOLODICHIEV ALEXANDER

I returned from Russian military service, feeling spiritually empty. I had grown up in a Communist family and did not know God. Some Satan worshipers invited me to join them, and I discovered religion. I attended their worship services until a devil-possessed girl began speaking to me in a man's voice. I was terrified.

My grandmother had told me, "If you are afraid, recite the "Our Father," the Lord's Prayer. I recited the prayer loudly, trying to drown out the girl. She pointed a finger at me and laughed furiously, but I chanted the prayer over and over.

I felt powerless in the face of this demon, as if I were trying to stop a military tank with a stick. I realized that I needed a stronger power, and the only power stronger than Satan was—God, the very Person I was railing against.

As I repeated the Lord's Prayer aloud, in my heart I was pleading, God, if You exist, protect me from this evil. As soon as I prayed, the girl fell down, silent. Suddenly everyone in the room became quiet. I ran past the girl and never returned.

Leaving the satanic church left an emptiness in my heart, a spiritual longing I did not know how to fill. But how could I get to know God? I began my search in my grandmother's church. The services were beautiful, but they seemed formal and cold. I did not find God there. Disappointed, I stopped trying and started drinking and smoking marijuana to drown my confusion.

One day some friends invited me to go with them to some evangelistic meetings to heckle the speaker. I went along. After several meetings, in spite of our bad manners, someone invited us to visit a house church. We went, and to our surprise, we liked it. Soon several of my heckling friends and I accepted Jesus as our Savior.

I remembered the books on the occult that I kept in my parents' home. I returned one night to retrieve the books and burn them. But the family awoke and began shouting at me for removing the books. I realized what a strong hold Satan had on my family, as well as on me. I wavered, but with prayer I was able to destroy the books and know God's complete forgiveness. A week later I was baptized.

God took a Satan worshiper and made him a disciple of Jesus. He has blessed my life beyond all I could have imagined and made it beautiful. I praise His name. Thank you for your weekly mission offerings, which helped make possible my introduction to Jesus.

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