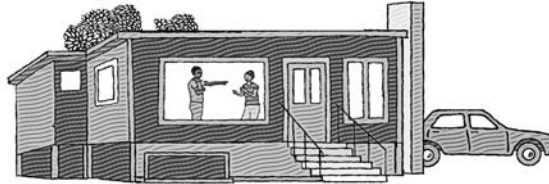


Little Times of Trouble



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Matt. 7:5; Eph. 1:7; Phil. 2:4–8; Eph. 4:26, 27; James 1:19, 20; Col. 3:19; Matt. 7:12.*

Memory Text: “‘Be angry, and do not sin’: do not let the sun go down on your wrath” (*Ephesians 4:26, NKJV*).

Even the best of homes will face times of struggle, times of conflict. It's just one of the facts of life in a fallen world. Simple things, such as whose turn it is to take out the trash, whether your teenage daughter finished her homework, whether your son has done his chores, are bothersome but relatively minor issues that can, generally, be resolved with minimal disruption. But other issues can threaten to disrupt family life. The mother-in-law whose abuse and manipulation threatens to destroy a woman's marriage and her health; the father with mental illness who abuses his children; the son who abandons all his religious upbringing to give himself to a promiscuous lifestyle; or the daughter who becomes a substance abuser.

Repeatedly in the New Testament we are told to love one another (*John 13:34, Rom. 12:10*), to live in peace and harmony with one another (*Rom. 15:5, Heb. 12:14*), to be patient, kind, and tenderhearted toward one another (*1 Cor. 13:4*), to consider others before ourselves (*Phil. 2:3*), and to bear one another's burdens (*Eph. 4:2*). Of course, all this is easier said than done, even with our own family members. In this lesson, we will look at some ways to help mollify little times of trouble, especially in the family.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 8.

Conflict

Read Matthew 7:5 and Proverbs 19:11. What two important principles can help us avoid conflict with others?

The writer of Proverbs makes a very astute observation: “The start of an argument is like a water leak—so stop it before real trouble breaks out” (*Prov. 17:14, CEV*). Once begun, a conflict can become incredibly hard to shut down. According to Romans 14:19, we can prevent conflict by following after two things: that which makes for peace and that with which one may edify another. How much more so are these principles crucial to harmony in the family?

Sometimes when you admit your responsibility in a conflict, it may cause the other party to soften. Take a step back and consider if it’s even a worthy battle. Proverbs states, “Those with good sense are slow to anger, and it is their glory to overlook an offense” (*Prov. 19:11, NRSV*). At the same time, consider what difference this is going to make in your life in three days. Better yet, what impact will it have in 5 or 10 years? How many marriages, for instance, have had difficult times over issues that today seem so trivial?

Instead of letting conflict drag on for a long time, as you speak with the other person, a spouse, a child, a friend, a coworker, you may want to clearly define the problem or issue under discussion and stay on the immediate topic. Conflict often deteriorates when the issue that started the conflict gets lost in angry words; meanwhile, past issues or past hurts are tossed into the mix (this can be deadly, especially to a marriage). One way to have a better and softer start to the discussion is to affirm your relationship. Let the other person know that you care deeply about them and about your relationship. Once you have stated your positive feelings, you can move to the issue at hand; however, be careful not to use the word *but*. Stating a positive thought and then saying “but” negates what you just stated. Once you share your feelings, listen to the other person’s perspective, reflect on what he or she has said, and only then propose a solution that keeps everyone’s best interests in mind (*Phil. 2:4, 5*).

Think back about some conflicts that now appear so silly and meaningless. What can you learn from those experiences that could help prevent, at least from your side, something similar from happening again?

Some Principles for Marriage

Marriage, like the Sabbath, is a gift of God to humanity that goes back to Eden. And, as Seventh-day Adventists, we know what the enemy of souls has done, and is still doing, to both the Sabbath and to marriage. Even the best of marriages are, at times, going to suffer from conflict.

What follow are a few principles that can help couples work through these issues.

Read Ephesians 1:7. What crucial principle is found here that must be part of any marriage?

You must learn to forgive, especially when your spouse doesn't deserve it. Anyone can forgive the deserving: in fact, that's hardly forgiveness. True forgiveness is forgiving those who don't warrant it, the way the Lord forgives us through Christ. We must do likewise. Otherwise, our marriage, if it survives (which isn't likely), will seem like purgatory.

Read Romans 3:23. What crucial principle is found here, as well?

You must accept that you're married to a sinner, to a being who has been damaged to some degree emotionally, physically, and spiritually. Get used to it. Accept your spouse's faults. Pray your way through them. You might have to live with those faults, but you don't have to obsess over them. If you do, they will eat you alive. A holy and perfect God, through Christ, accepts us as we are: you, who are hardly holy and perfect, must do the same with your spouse.

Read Philippians 2:4–8. What important principle here, as well, can we use that can help us, not just in marriage but in all potentially troublesome relationships?

The Role of Anger in Conflict

Who hasn't experienced anger at one point or another? What makes it harder is when that anger is directed at a family member. Along with refusing to forgive, anger can turn into a poison that will wreak great pain and suffering on the home and family and relationships in general.

Read Ephesians 4:26, 27 and Ecclesiastes 7:9. How can we balance our understanding of anger as an emotion and anger as a sin? What is the difference?

What does James say in James 1:19, 20 that we should apply at all times that we can—but especially when dealing with family members whose actions and attitudes and words make us angry?

If you're angry about something, instead of letting it hover like a dark cloud over your life, turn it into something positive. Pray for those who hurt and abuse you, forgive them and become a blessing to them. It probably won't be easy at first, but when you make the decision and stick with it, God will take care of the rest.

Sometimes the root of anger stems from the homes we grew up in. Angry people often come from angry families because they learn from their role models and carry on the same behavior in their own lives, eventually passing it on to their children. At times anger may be the result of unmet needs or due to jealousy, as was Cain's case, which led to the murder of his brother.

You may have a good reason to be angry, but don't use it as an excuse to stay that way. Don't deny it or try to justify it. Instead, ask God to help you deal with it in a positive way. The apostle Paul gives us good advice: "Don't let evil defeat you, but defeat evil with good" (*Rom. 12:21, CEV*).

We all have things that anger us, even to the point of pain. And, in some cases, we probably are justified in that anger. The question is, How can we, through the power of God, not let that anger make us, and others around us, miserable?

Conflict, Abuse, Power, and Control

Sometimes unresolved conflict and anger may develop into a very negative, destructive dynamic, even an abusive relationship. Abuse can take a number of forms—physical, verbal, emotional, psychological, sexual, et cetera. But any form of abuse is contrary to the central principle of God’s kingdom—unselfish love.

What crucial teachings about relationships are found in 1 John 4:7, 8 and Colossians 3:19?

“Husbands, love your wives and do not be harsh with them” (*Col. 3:19, NIV*). The word *harsh* in the original Greek language refers to one’s being angry or bitter toward the partner, causing continued pain, intense hostility, and expressions of hatred toward the other. Paul is very clear that a spouse is not to be hostile or violent. Emotional, sexual, and physical abuse is not acceptable behavior for a Christian husband or partner. Instead, what is acceptable is to love your spouse. Paul also makes it clear that love is patient and kind and that love does not envy, does not boast, is not proud, is not rude, is not self-seeking, is not easily angered, does not keep record of wrongs, does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth. Love always protects, always trusts, always hopes, and always perseveres. None of the attributes of love even remotely condones or accepts abuse in any way, shape, or form.

A healthy relationship is one in which both partners feel protected and safe, in which anger is managed in a healthy way, and in which serving one another is the norm. Often victims of abuse feel guilty, as if they were responsible for provoking their abuser or that perhaps they somehow deserve the abuse they receive. Abusers can be quite controlling and often skillful at making their victims feel responsible. The truth is that no one deserves to be abused by another, and abusers are responsible for their own choices and actions. The good news is that the Bible offers comfort, not guilt, for the victims of abuse. In some situations, in which the problem gets unmanageable, people should not be afraid to seek outside help.

How unfortunate that some cultures all but condone abuse of women. Why should no Christian ever fall into that kind of behavior, regardless of what their culture allows?

Forgiveness and Peace

“Treat others as you want them to treat you. This is what the Law and the Prophets are all about” (Matt. 7:12, CEV). Think about all the ways in your own experience, within the family and without, in which you need to apply this principle, and, on the lines below, write down just what those times might be and determine, by faith, how you can do just that.

The writer of Hebrews counseled, “Pursue peace with all *people*, and holiness, without which no one will see the Lord” (*Heb. 12:14, NKJV*). Even when we take all the steps necessary, some people who have hurt us will still not listen and change. Perhaps some may offer an apology, but others will not. Either way, it is to our benefit, especially when it is a family member, that we take the journey of forgiveness talked about earlier.

In fact, forgiveness is an essential part of conflict resolution, especially in the family. When a person sins against us, God’s enemy loves to place a wall between us and that person, a roadblock that prevents us from loving that person as Christ loved us. Forgiveness is a choice that we make to get around that roadblock.

“We are not forgiven because we forgive, but as we forgive. The ground of all forgiveness is found in the unmerited love of God, but by our attitude toward others we show whether we have made that love our own. Wherefore Christ says, ‘With what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.’ Matt. 7:2.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 251.

At the same time, when we are the ones at fault, we need to try to restore the broken relationship with another person, which may involve going to the other person and telling him or her that you regret what you’ve done and asking for their forgiveness. That’s what Jesus said: “So if you are about to place your gift on the altar and remember that someone is angry with you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. Make peace with that person, then come back and offer your gift to God” (*Matt. 5:23, 24, CEV*). It is nice when someone who has hurt us apologizes and asks for forgiveness. Likewise, it is nice when we give others the same type of care.

How does thinking about all that you need to be forgiven of help you learn to forgive others?

Further Thought: “Too often the parents are not united in their family government. The father, who is with his children but little, and is ignorant of their peculiarities of disposition and temperament, is harsh and severe. He does not control his temper, but corrects in passion. The child knows this, and instead of being subdued, the punishment fills him with anger. The mother allows misdemeanors to pass at one time for which she will severely punish at another. The children never know just what to expect, and are tempted to see how far they can transgress with impunity. Thus are sown seeds of evil that spring up and bear fruit.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, pp. 314, 315.

“Home is to be the center of the purest and most elevated affection. Peace, harmony, affection, and happiness should be perseveringly cherished every day, until these precious things abide in the hearts of those who compose the family. The plant of love must be carefully nourished, else it will die. Every good principle must be cherished if we would have it thrive in the soul. That which Satan plants in the heart—envy, jealousy, evil surmising, evil speaking, impatience, prejudice, selfishness, covetousness, and vanity—must be uprooted. If these evil things are allowed to remain in the soul, they will bear fruit by which many shall be defiled. Oh, how many cultivate the poisonous plants that kill out the precious fruits of love and defile the soul!”—Pages 195, 196.

Discussion Questions:

1 Read the following quote from a book about marriage. “‘For we have not an high priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities; but was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin’ (Heb. 4:15). Just as Christ put Himself in our situation, to best relate to us, we should do the same with our marriage partner. Try to view any given situation or crisis not just from your *own perspective* but from your spouse’s. See how he or she views the situation, how it has an impact on him or her, and why he or she would feel about it the way he or she does. This principle can go a long way in alleviating tough situations.”—Clifford Goldstein, *The Mules That Angels Ride* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald® Publishing Association, 2005), p. 25. In what ways can we apply this principle to all areas of potential conflict with others?

2 In class, answer the question, “Is anger always a sin?” Defend your position.

Paying With Prayer

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

Choomba Simillah was being expelled from the University of Zambia. He owed 9,000 Zambian kwacha (about US\$900), and he had no idea where to obtain the money.

But Simillah wasn't going to give up. He was studying for a bachelor's degree at the public university while teaching at Rusangu Secondary School, a Seventh-day Adventist boarding academy in Zambia.

Simillah approached various people to ask to borrow the money. He looked for a way to sell his car, a maroon Toyota Voltz. He prayed to God to intervene.

Then he went to a bank in Monze, the nearest town to Rusangu Secondary School, to apply for a loan. He learned, however, that the bank had stopped offering loans.

As he dejectedly left the bank, a friend called out on the street, "Can I hire your car for 21 days?"

Simillah looked up.

"There is a white man who has a daughter coming here for the holidays," the friend said. "He wants to travel. He asked me to look for a sound car, and I think yours will do."

"That sounds like an opportunity," Simillah said. "What should I do?"

"Just take your car to the car wash," the friend said.

Simillah gave his car a good wash and met with the man, who was spending several months with a friend in Monze. He said he wanted to take his daughter on a tour of Zambia and offered 12,000 kwacha to borrow the car for 21 days. The amount was enough to buy a secondhand car.

"I couldn't believe it," Simillah said in an interview.

The man wanted to take the car on a Saturday. Simillah needed the money, but he refused, not wanting to engage in a business transaction on the Sabbath.

"No, we can meet on Sunday," he said, praying silently that the man wouldn't change his mind.

The man agreed to pick up the car on Sunday and offered him the cash on the spot.

Simillah promptly returned title and went to the university to pay off his bill.

He never was expelled and graduated in 2016.

Now more than ever, he believes in the power of prayer.

"Be patient and trust in God," said Simillah, 37. "You might struggle to do this or that, but He knows what you want. His appointed time always comes."



The Rusangu Mission, where the secondary school is located, was established with mission funds in the early 1900s. Thank you for your mission offering.

Part I: Overview

“Little times of trouble” will be part of all relationships that venture past mere acquaintance. Prevention through wise Christian principles should always be the policy. But sooner or later, conflicts will slip into even the closest and healthiest of relationships. Fortunately, the Bible is full of insights to ensure that conflicts don’t become conflagrations that destroy families and friendships.

Being told to love and be kind (*John 13:34, 35*), live in peace and harmony with one another (*Rom. 15:13–16*), and forgive (*Eph. 4:31, 32*) may sound like banal family advice for Christians. But these are exactly the attitudes one is quick to forget in times of conflict. Perhaps the hardest thing to do in an emotionally escalating situation is to remember that our Christianity is to be palpable in those moments. To put it more bluntly, one could say our Christian witness stands or falls, not when we are at church, in prayer, or in Bible study but when we are in the privacy of our homes, engaging with our families.

Because family members are bound to do or say things that they will eventually regret, forgiveness becomes a key component in the discussion of family troubles. Being one who is quick to forgive, who doesn’t keep a record of past wrongs, and who doesn’t passively resent the other person (while feigning forgiveness) is nothing short of miraculous. One couple shared how their forgiveness had to deepen once they got married: “Our character flaws spilled all over the place once we married. We had to go from learning to just forgive one another for isolated mistakes to learning how to forgive *who* the other person was.” In order to forgive like that and manifest Christlike forgiveness toward our family, God’s forgiveness for us through Christ needs to be kept front and center (*Eph. 1:7*).

Part II: Commentary

Scripture

The Sermon on the Mount is an exposition on holiness, a paragon of ethical teaching, and has been considered the “Kingdom Manifesto.” A manifesto declares the intentions and objectives of a government or movement. The nature and character of the kingdom Jesus inaugurated is on display in His most well-known sermon. No wonder it serves doubly as a rich resource of familial advice and wisdom. Kingdom principles are played out in the context of relationships; so, familial relationships are fair game as the target of God’s kingdom intentions.

The lesson refers to Christ's counsel, " 'You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye' " (*Matt. 7:5, ESV*), as a principle that can help avert conflict. This verse and the surrounding passage are probably the most used and misused section of anything Christ ever spoke. Therefore, this section bears some further reflection.

If there is one phrase in all of Scripture that has permeated into the verbal arsenal of Western culture, known by both Christian and secularist alike, it is " 'Judge not, that you be not judged' " (*Matt. 7:1, ESV*). This aphorism, of course, is the context for what Jesus says about "logs" and "eyes." Unfortunately, this phrase has been co-opted by a relativistic worldview and used ubiquitously to stop anyone from saying that anybody is doing anything wrong, which, of course, would be a "judgment" made on that person. To keep this discussion along relational lines, marriages would not go far, or would be severely stunted, if judgments of right/wrong, good/bad, loving/unloving, or helpful/hurtful could not be made on a regular basis without " 'Judge not' " being invoked as a dialogue stopper. Anyone familiar at all with the Bible or Jesus' teachings knows that this invocation certainly is not the proper application of this phrase. So what is the proper application of this teaching of Christ? How can it be a key in preventing, and perhaps resolving, conflict, especially within families?

Perhaps the best place to start understanding the purpose of Matthew 7:1–5 is to visualize the picture Jesus paints. It certainly isn't about denying the existence of problems in other people's, or one's own, family. Problems the size of logs (*δοκός*: wood the size of floor paneling in Solomon's temple [*1 Kings 6:15, LXX*]) are sticking out of eyes. But here is the striking contrast Jesus makes. Those with the big problems, the logs, are correcting/rebuking those with the smaller problems, ones that Jesus likens to specks. And they are doing so in a hypocritical fashion (*Matt. 7:5*). It is this posture of engagement that is so detrimental to relationships—the one who commits the flagrant sin, perhaps in a state of total denial, attacking some peccadillo that he or she microscopically identifies in another. Often the best way to hide one's own faults is to viciously attack others for theirs. This behavior is a recipe for disaster in relationships, marriage and family included.

Amazingly, Jesus engenders hope that both individuals can stand before each other, clear of their ocular impediments. This hope is good news for relations between husbands, wives, parents, children, and siblings. Our problems, issues, or sins don't have to have the last word in undercutting our relationships with one another. Conflict does not have to be all-consuming, but Jesus' simple, yet not easy, command needs to be heeded: " 'first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your brother's eye' " (*Matt. 7:5, ESV*). Here, then, is the posture of prevention and resolve when conflict

threatens relationships: (1) Before one addresses another's problems, one should come with an attitude that his or her own problems are *greater* than those they are addressing. (2) Ask the other person to point out blind spots (logs) that have gone unaddressed or denied. (3) Ask for forgiveness for one's own sins, which, if they are logs, have been doing a lot more damage in the relationship than the specks he or she hoped to address. (4) If things go well, one can ask (*Matt. 7:7*) if *now* is a good time to share concerns he or she has with their partner for the growth and preservation of the relationship. Christ's counsel, the presence of His Spirit, and a humble, teachable attitude will go a long way in conflict prevention and resolve. The judgmental, hypocritical attack of another's faults will be ineffective at resolving anything and will possibly only invite the same response. Jesus knew this and therefore warned, " 'Judge not, that you be not judged' " (*Matt. 7:1, ESV*).

Forgiveness

The secret (if it can be called that) to being an inveterate forgiver is to live the life of the forgiven: "Be kind to one another, . . . forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you" (*Eph. 4:32, ESV*). But intellectually accepting that God has forgiven us is different from actually *living* the forgiven life. Nowhere in Scripture is this difference more striking than in Jesus' famous parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18:23–35. From this angle, one could say that the unforgiving servant (forgiven 10,000 talents) did not appropriate the reality of his forgiveness to the degree that it compelled him to offer even a fraction of that forgiveness to another (100 denarii). He heard he was forgiven, maybe believed it, too; but it didn't become a central feature by which he lived and treated others. If forgiveness is to flow freely between family members, then God's forgiveness of *us* needs to be a controlling feature of our lives, influencing our treatment of one another.

A corollary idea of "living forgiven" is to address the one person we often have the hardest time forgiving. No one highlights this point better than Brennan Manning: "Jesus challenges us to forgive everyone we know. . . . Right now someone exists who has disappointed and offended us, someone with whom we are continually displeased and with whom we are more impatient, irritated, unforgiving, and spiteful than we would dare be with anyone else. That person is ourselves. We are so often fed up with ourselves. We're sick of our own mediocrity, revolted by our own inconsistency, bored by our own monotony. We would never judge any other of God's children with the savage self-condemnation with which we crush ourselves. Jesus said we are to love our neighbor as ourselves. We must be patient, gentle, and compassionate with ourselves in the same way we

try to love our neighbor.”—*The Signature of Jesus* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Multnomah Books, 1996), p. 162. Or as Francis MacNutt famously quipped: “If the Lord Jesus Christ has washed you in his own blood and forgiven you all your sins, how dare you refuse to forgive yourself?”—*The Signature of Jesus*, p. 101.

So, we can take heart in living under the glorious realization that through Christ we are thoroughly forgiven. Having the Holy Spirit press that truth through the membrane of our souls, we will be able to genuinely forgive one another. This understanding truly is a key for experiencing peace within the family.

Part III: Life Application

Regardless of all that has been said theologically and practically about forgiveness in the Christian church, forgiveness, as a whole, can still be very difficult in certain situations. We have a tendency to hold on to past offenses with clenched fists, especially if wrongs have gone unresolved. Discuss with the class strategies to “let go” and offer the reminder that the grudges harm only the bearer, not the perpetrator. Here is an ancient parable that nails that point:

Two monks (an older and younger), on their way to a monastery high in the mountains, came across a woman who was having difficulty crossing a swift running creek. Given that the monks kept strict vows not to touch women, the younger assumed they would pass her by. But the older monk hoisted the woman on his back, carried her across the creek, and let her down on the other side. The younger monk was offended, but he repressed his objections for hours until they reached the summit of the mountain, upon which he exploded with “How could you violate our vows and carry that woman on your back?” The older monk replied, “It is true; I carried her across the creek, but you carried her all the way up the mountain.” Christians have no need to carry the burden of resentment or unforgiveness. The Lord is well able to bear the sins of the world; He doesn’t need our help.

Notes

TEACHERS COMMENTS
