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Religion in Relationships

Life is lived in relationships. Some are deep-rooted, others superficial; some are of short duration, others last a lifetime. Some are purely functional, others intensely personal.

We relate to all kinds of people: to a partner, to children, to relatives, to friends and neighbors but also to the service-station attendant, to the person with whom we share a shift at work, and to the police officer who stops us for speeding. And we relate to our pastor, to the superintendent of the school in which we have enrolled our children, to our employer, and, yes, to the tax collector.

All this is true for Christians, as well as for non-Christians. The difference between us and our non-Christian counterparts is not that we live in multiple relationships but that there is an important extra dimension to those relationships: our religion.

As Seventh-day Adventists, we believe in a set of doctrines. Some we share with other Christians; some are unique to us and help mark us as a *special* people with a unique message and mission. Doctrines are not optional, not if our faith is going to be more than a shallow feeling or a vague awareness of some greater power or transcendent force that somehow relates to us. Doctrines rendered into words—as best as can be expressed within the confines of human language—reveal how we understand the divine self-revelation of God. They help us achieve a clearer sense of who and what God (as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit) is and what He has done, is doing, and will ultimately do for us as individuals and as a race. We need doctrines to grasp what the implications of our belief in God and His plan of salvation are for our perspective on life and for our daily conduct.

But Christianity—and most definitely Adventist Christianity—is more than a catalog of doctrinal statements. The Christian God is not a distant, impersonal deity who does not get involved in the daily grind of this world and of our existence. Instead, He is a personal God of love who has encountered us in Jesus Christ, in the most personal way possible.

God is a covenant God, One who goes out of His way to establish a close relationship, One who is Love Personified, and One who seeks for a reaction to that love—a response of worship, obedience, and love. Once we have established a relationship with God (or,

more correctly, once we have allowed God to establish a relationship with us), this affects every other relationship we may have.

Once we have gained a glimpse of who and what God is, once we have accepted the Lord Jesus as our Savior and have welcomed the Spirit as our Guide on our pilgrimage through life, we are able to look at the world from a new perspective. No longer is it of prime importance whether or not the people with whom we associate are of the same nationality or ethnicity or of the same political persuasion as we are. The first question we will ask about the people with whom we come in contact is whether they already share with us the knowledge of the good news!

***A religion that
does not permeate
daily life is dead
and meaningless.***

Religion is not work based—in other words, our standing with God does not depend on our achievements. We live by faith through grace. Yet, a religion that does not permeate our daily lives is a dead and meaningless exercise (*James 2:17*). If our relationship with God does not impact our relationships with fellow humans, we have every reason to wonder whether this bond with God is a reality.

This quarter we will study numerous passages of Scripture with the intention of increasing our awareness of the ways by which our faith impacts our relationship to others—to those who are close to us and those who are afar. We will discuss how we can strengthen those relationships, even restore them if they have somehow broken down. We will discover that, indeed, there is more religion in relationships than many may suspect.

This quarter's *Adult Bible Study Guide* was written by Reinder Bruinsma, a native Dutchman and longtime church worker (including six years, from 1995-2001, as executive secretary of the Trans-European Division). He is also the author of 15 books in both English and Dutch. In 2001, he returned to his native Netherlands, where he serves as the president of the Netherlands Union. His pastoral concern about practical Christianity, about how we treat others, comes through in every lesson this quarter.

How to Use This Teachers Edition

The teachers comments demonstrate different methods of teaching the Standard Bible Study Guide. Five parts make up the teachers comments:

- ▶ **Key Text, Lesson Aim, and Outline:** The key text is taken from the standard edition guide. The lesson aim is designed to: (a) help class participants understand and know about the lesson material, (b) evoke an appropriate feeling about the lesson material that complements the lesson content and helps to internalize it, and (c) help class participants apply the lesson material to their daily lives. The lesson outline may not always follow exactly the material that appears in the standard guide. It may reflect additional perspectives as it attempts to stimulate class discussion.
- ▶ **The Commentary** follows the traditional teaching methods of Sabbath School. It explains Bible passages and provides appropriate information leading to spiritual applications.
- ▶ **The Inductive Bible-Study** method emphasizes careful, methodical discovery of the meaning in a text. The teacher encourages and supports the learner's investigation and discovery, using distinctive approaches: (a) Study a text thoroughly and systematically before drawing a conclusion. (b) Look for textual meaning carefully and thoroughly; understand the passage in context; avoid misquoting the author. We must not develop opinions without biblical proof. (c) Share insights through group discussion as students examine a Bible passage together. (d) Apply the text to life today. (e) Allow the Holy Spirit to minister to class members during Bible study.
- ▶ **The Focus-on-Witnessing Approach** should be used in conjunction with other methods of Bible study to demonstrate how particular passages of Scripture can be used to encourage people to commit their lives to Christ and to nurture spiritual life once it has been awakened.
- ▶ **The Life-Application Approach** demonstrates how issues that grow out of Bible study can be shared in a small-group setting. This section uses an approach suitable for discussion in a small group in which interpersonal sharing and dialogue are key elements.

Use a combination of teaching methods. Within one class period it is often possible to draw from all five methods demonstrated in the teachers comments. Some teachers will prefer to focus on one method of teaching, drawing heavily on the material in the teachers comments.