

Keys to Family Unity



SABBATH—FEBRUARY 18

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY: Genesis 33:12-14; Ruth 1:16-18; John 17:21-26; Galatians 3:28; Ephesians 2:11-22; Ephesians 5:21-6:9.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘That all of them [Christians] will be one, just as you [God] are in me [Jesus] and I [Jesus] am in you. I want them also to be in us. Then the world will believe that you have sent me.’ ” (John 17:21, NIV).

LIFE IN THE CHURCH HELPS US GROW CLOSER AT HOME. The same principles¹ that draw us together as a church are the same principles that draw family members together. These principles are love, humility, selflessness, and concern for others.

These principles are not easy to live by. We always have to fight against our sinful, selfish natures. But through Christ's sacrifice on the cross, we can be reunited with God and with others (Ephesians 2:13-16; Colossians 1:21-23). Every day, we must depend on Christ's grace to help us reunite with God and with others. Only Christ's grace can help us. And each day, we must choose to be what He wants us to be.

A LOOK AT THIS WEEK'S LESSON: The Bible glorifies Christ as the great Center of all things. He pulls all disconnected relationships² together in His body on the cross.

Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 25.

¹principles—basic rules.

²relationships—the connections we have with people.

SUNDAY—FEBRUARY 18**CHRIST THE CENTER
(Galatians 3:28).**

How does Paul describe the new unity among people in Christ? How has Christ made “one” out of “two”? Ephesians 2:11-22; Galatians 3:28.

The cross of Christ removes the walls that separate people from each other. Walls in the temple separated men from women. Jews also separated themselves from Gentiles.³ But Paul used language that shows unity between nations, people groups, social classes, and males and females. “He [Christ] wanted to create one group of people out of the two. He wanted to make peace between them” (Ephesians 2:15, NIV). This is good news that helps married couples to truly know one flesh unity in marriage. By faith in Christ, divided families can be brought back together.

It is one thing to quote Bible verses about unity in Christ. But it is another thing to really experience unity. What changes does Christ bring to our lives that help us to experience the unity He promises us? Romans 6:4-7; 2 Corinthians 5:17; Ephesians 4:24-32.

“Think of a large circle. Many lines

are all running to the center from the edge. The nearer these lines reach the center, the nearer they are to one another. . . .

“In the same way, the closer we come to Christ, the nearer we shall be to one another.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 179.



Close to Christ equals close to one another.

“Between father and son, husband and wife . . . stands Christ the Mediator.⁴ We cannot establish direct connections with others except through Christ, through His Word (the Bible), and through our following Him.”—Adapted from Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*⁵ (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1963), p. 86.

How close is your family or church family to the Center of that circle (Christ)? What else must be present in order for us to be united?

³Gentiles—people who are not Jews.

⁴Mediator—one who serves as a peacemaker between two groups or persons. Christ is our Mediator between ourselves and God the Father.

⁵discipleship—the practice of following Jesus in all He wants you to do.

MONDAY—FEBRUARY 19**BECOMING ONE THROUGH
CHRIST'S LOVE
(1 Thessalonians 3:12).**

Jesus prayed to His Father that His (Jesus') followers would " 'be one as we [Jesus and His Father] are one' " (John 17:22, NIV). What is Jesus saying in John 17:22? Why is love needed to have this oneness?

Unity among His followers was on Jesus' mind in John 17:22. Experiencing *agape*⁶ love is very important to this unity. *Agape* is the Bible word for God's love. *Agape* love is God's very nature (1 John 4:8). *Agape* love is the kind of love Jesus' followers are to have (John 13:35). But *agape* love is not natural to sinners. *Agape* comes into our life as Jesus lives in us by His Holy Spirit (Romans 5:5; Romans 8:9, 11).

" 'Love each other as I [Jesus] have loved you' " (John 15:12, NIV). The disciple John wrote that Jesus said these words. John was once a proud, power-hungry, critical, and hot-tempered person (Mark 3:17; Luke 9:54, 55; read also *The Desire of Ages*, p. 295). Later in life, John remembered how Jesus continued to love him, even though he had these bad character traits. Jesus' love slowly changed John. Jesus' love helped John to love others in Christian unity. "We love Him because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19, NKJV). John also

wrote, "If God loved us, we also ought to love one another" (1 John 4:11, NKJV).

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8. Put your name where the word "love" appears. How well does your name fit there? Ask Jesus to bring love into your life by His Holy Spirit. What changes might the Holy Spirit encourage you to make in order to have *agape* love?



"May your love for others be like a rising flood" (1 Thessalonians 3:12, NIV).

TUESDAY—FEBRUARY 20**SELFISHNESS:
FAMILY DESTROYER
(Philippians 2:3-5).**

"If we would put aside pride and selfishness, it would take us five minutes to remove most difficulties."—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, p. 119.

Sin has polluted our natures. The greatest example of that pollution is selfishness. We are born selfish. We can see selfishness in small children.

⁶agape—the kind of love that is based on principle, not on emotion. (A principle is a basic rule of life that helps to make more specific rules.)

Their basic nature is to want for themselves. Me, me, me . . . By the time we reach adulthood, we are selfish in some terrible ways, especially in the home.

Jesus came to take away our selfishness (Ephesians 4:24). The Bible promises us that we, through Him, do not have to be controlled by selfishness. Jesus' life is a perfect example of unselfishness. He showed Himself to be so unselfish that, if we copy His life we will stop living only for ourselves (1 John 2:6).

What do the following verses tell us about living a life of selflessness?

Philippians 2:3-8 _____

1 John 3:16-18 _____

As Ellen White wrote on page 57, if people would stop being proud and selfish, so many problems could be solved very quickly. Problems could be solved long before they become worse or grow into something terrible. All members of the family must give up selfishness (Proverbs 16:6) at the foot of the cross. The cross is the greatest example in all the universe

of selflessness. We need to daily pray before the cross in faith, tears, and surrender to Christ.



How much time are you spending at the Cross fighting against the selfishness that appears in your life? How does Matthew 7:16 help to show you if you have been spending enough time at the Cross?

WEDNESDAY—FEBRUARY 21

SUBMISSION (SURRENDER) (Ephesians 5:21).

What advice does Paul have about being humble and giving service in relationships? Ephesians 5:21. How do you think this advice encourages unity in the church? Why is this advice so important at home? Ephesians 5:21–6:9.

The word “submit” (surrender)

(Ephesians 5:21) means to put another person's needs in front of your own. Such submission began with Christ (Matthew 20:26-28; John 13:4, 5; Philippians 2:5-8). All those filled with the Holy Spirit will put other people's needs in front of their own (Ephesians 5:18). "Reverence⁷ for Christ" is what encourages people to submit in this way (Ephesians 5:21, NIV). That all people should take part in submission is a Christian teaching about relationships that could cause many great and wonderful changes. Submission brings to life the spiritual idea that we are all one in Christ. There are no exceptions.

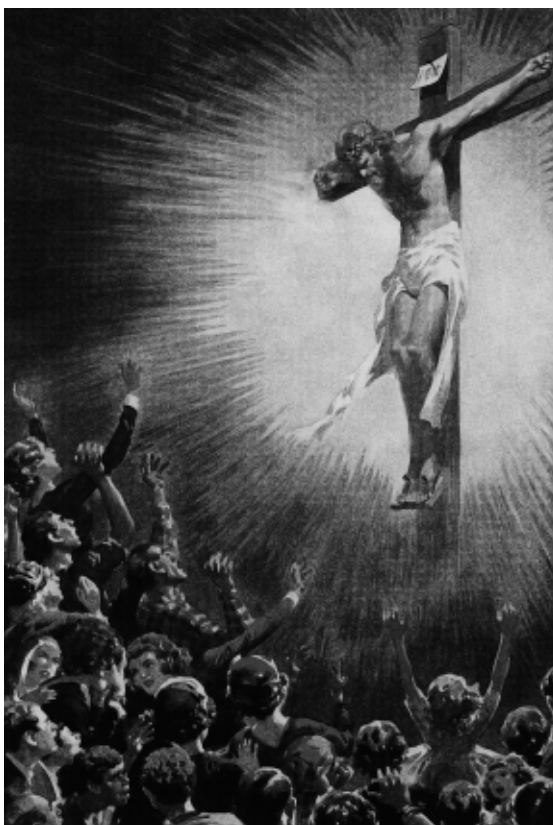
A household principle: The testing ground of Christian submission is in the home. If family members submit to one another, it will make a big difference in the church. Paul moves quickly from the introduction of the principle of submission to discuss how submission is to work in families.

Three pairs of relationships are discussed in Ephesians 5:22–6:9. They are the most common but most unequal relationships in society. The purpose is not to support an ongoing social order. Instead, the purpose is to show how Christ's church works when different people submit to one another.

Why do you think Paul speaks first to people who are socially weaker: the wives, children, and

slaves? What does Paul say their submission should be based upon? Ephesians 5:22; Ephesians 6:1, 7.

Those with greater social power—husbands, parents, masters—always were spoken of second. Each receives a command quite uncommon to the culture of Paul's time. This command must have surprised these people. The command made everyone equal at the cross. The commands opened the way for true oneness (unity) to be experienced in relationships.



We are equal before the cross.

⁷reverence—deep respect; great respect and awe.

THURSDAY—FEBRUARY 22**LIVING THE LOVE WE PROMISE
(Hosea 1:2, 3, 6, 8).**

Family unity depends on family members being responsible to each other. Family unity begins with the responsibility the husband and wife have to care for one another. Sadly, the Bible is full of examples of families that failed in their responsibility to each other. But the Bible also has inspiring examples of family members who dedicated themselves to being responsible to each other. They did so with God's help.

Study the following families. How responsible were they? How could some of them have been more responsible? What encouraged some of the families to be responsible?

- Parent-child responsibility (Genesis 33:12-14; Exodus 2:1-10).
- Brothers' and sisters' responsibilities toward one another (Genesis 37:17-28).
- Family responsibility (Ruth 1:16-18; Ruth 2:11, 12, 20; Ruth 3:7-13; Ruth 4:9-13).
- Spouses⁸ responsibilities (Hosea 1:2, 3, 6, 8; Hosea 3:1-3).

⁸spouse—a husband or a wife.

When we are responsible toward another person, as in marriage or in the decision to have a child, we must be willing to give of ourselves and of our time. Laws may limit negative behavior. But marriage and family relationships need love so they will succeed.

What does Jesus' promise of responsibility to us in Hebrews 13:5 mean to you personally? What result should His responsibility to you have on your responsibility to Him, to your spouse, to your children, and to other Christians?

FRIDAY—FEBRUARY 23

ADDITIONAL STUDY: Ellen G. White, "A Sacred [Holy] Circle," *The Adventist Home*, pp. 177–180; *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, pp. 236–238.

Unity—the first work: "The first work of Christians is to be united in the family. . . .

"The more closely the members of a family are united in the home, the more noble and helpful will be the influence that father and mother and sons and daughters will have outside the home"—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 37.

The secret of family unity: "The cause of separation and disagreement in families and in the church is separation from Christ. To come near

to Christ is to come near to one another. The secret of true unity in the church and in the family is union with Christ.”—Adapted from Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 179.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. Talk about the influences in your own society that work against family unity. What useful answer can you offer to a family that is struggling against these influences?
2. Is there a family in your church that has come apart? What can you do as a class to help each

member of this family?

3. Discuss the question of submission (surrender). How is submission to be understood by Christians? How has the principle of submission been used in wrong ways?

SUMMARY: The Bible honors Christ as the great Center. He draws all disconnected relationships together at the Cross. His love wins sinners and brings them together within a warm and caring fellowship that surprises the world and glorifies God.