

God's Word on Family Living



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 20:12, Ps. 18:2, Song of Solomon, Isa. 54:5, 62:5, John 10:11, 15:5, Eph. 5:21-25.*

Memory Text: “For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope” (*Romans 15:4, NIV*).

The Week at a Glance: Within the pages of His Word, God has unfolded His plans and purposes for families.

Visitors to a science theater were given special eyeglasses. In the darkened room the group saw dramatic nature scenes on a large screen. First, they looked at the pictures without the glasses; afterward, they put the glasses on, and when they did, a photo of an orchard in full bloom brought gasps from the crowd: “Oh, how magnificent!” “What a difference!” It seemed as if the branches stuck out from the screen over their heads. Like these three-dimensional glasses, a change of perspective in looking at Scripture can help us see and appreciate old truths in fresh ways. This week we will put on *family glasses* and view the different ways in which God in His Word has revealed truths about families and family living. This perspective transforms the Bible into a contemporary textbook for life in our homes, as well as in the church, the household of faith.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 14.*

Family Commandments

One way in which Scripture presents its message on family life is through *relational directives*. Some of these command statements apply broadly to all relationships; some address neighborliness and friendship; while others are given for husbands, wives, parents, and children.

What do the following texts teach us about the kinds of “relational directives” we have been given by the Lord?

Exod. 20:12

Exod. 20:14

Deut. 6:6, 7

Prov. 5:18, 19

Eph. 5:21-25

Eph. 5:33

Eph. 6:4

Col. 3:20

1 Pet. 3:7

The quality of marriage and parent-child relationships are important to God. Three of the Ten Commandments focus directly on family life: “Honor your father and your mother” (*Exod. 20:12, NKJV*), “You shall not commit adultery” (*vs. 14, NKJV*), “You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife” (*vs. 17, NKJV*). Other specific directives flesh out God’s expectations for marriage, parent-child relationships, and life in families. General relational directives, such as “‘love your enemies’” (*Matt. 5:44, NIV*), “‘do to others what you would have them do to you’” (*Matt. 7:12, NIV*), and “‘love one another’” (*John 13:34, NIV*) apply equally to relationships at home.

Go back over those relational directives and ask yourself, In which area(s) do I need to make some changes, and what will it take in order for me to make those changes?

Family Narratives

Bible stories provide glimpses into people's lives. The accounts show how, over the course of individuals' lives, they reap the consequences of their choices and grow in spite of setbacks. Through these stories we see how God abides with His people, even through difficult times.

Capture the flavor of a Bible narrative by reading Ruth 1 and 2 (you might even want to read the whole story). What lessons can you learn here about family living?

Not unlike many families today, this Bible family was hit by a series of life-changing losses. Famine, relocation to another country, death of her husband, and death of both sons left Naomi reeling. As the story opens, she despairs, feeling mournful, bitter, and alone. However, as this book shows so well, family means committed companionship. It means helping one another in troubled times and caring for the helpless. Ruth, Naomi's Moabite daughter-in-law, exhibits extraordinary faith in God. She shows this by her loyalty and service to the despondent Naomi. Faced with incredible hardship, these two unfortunate souls finally get real help from a perceptive wealthy relative—Boaz. In fulfilling his legal responsibility (and also obviously acting out of love), Boaz marries Ruth. Those who enjoy a love story are treated to an example of the One who loves with an everlasting love, who does not rest until He, like Boaz, obtains the object of His love. In the end, the baby born to Boaz and Ruth softens the painful memories and provides joy for the present and hope for the future.

Ourselves in view. Stories like these are in the Bible for a purpose. They instruct, inspire, correct, and train God's people in right living (*Rom. 15:4, 2 Tim. 3:16*). Readers find themselves in them and take comfort in the fact they are not alone in temptation and trial, in struggles and setbacks. The Scriptures' honesty about the weaknesses and mistakes of others reveals pitfalls and how to avoid them. Further, we see good qualities we want to copy for ourselves. God's longsuffering and patience inspire our hearts with courage and hope that He who never changes will be with us today also.

What could you learn from the story of Ruth that could help you and your family through a bad time?

Principles of Relationships

Quite a different category of scriptural instruction about relationships is found in the Bible's presentation of *relational principles*. The book of Proverbs has the greatest collection of this material.

What truths do these examples of relational principles convey? How do you think the writer reached his inspired conclusions?

Prov. 12:25

Prov. 15:1

Prov. 17:9

Prov. 17:22

Solomon was a keen observer of nature, and because his capital, Jerusalem, sat right on the trade routes, he had contacts with people from many parts of the world. Inspired by the Holy Spirit, he made a special study of people; his careful observations, scattered throughout Proverbs, speak of universal principles that govern human feelings and reactions.

Principles implanted by the Creator: The universal principles of emotions and relationships Solomon observed reflect the truth described by Ellen White when she wrote, "The senses, the faculties of the mind . . . were placed under law."—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 415. Though sin has damaged God's creation, human behavior in relationships is still shaped by the laws He implanted within human beings. To discover and apply the insights gained from these principles is to acquire the keys to better family living.

How do you think these implanted relational principles have been affected by sin? What difference does the gospel make? Compare Matthew 12:34, 35 with Philipians 2:2-11 as you think about your answer.

Like an infectious computer virus, sin corrupts the core of human beings, rendering them self-centered and fouling the functioning of all their physical, mental, social, emotional, and spiritual processes. The gospel puts people right with God and with one another through Christ (2 Cor. 5:18, 19).

The Royal Love Poem

Further insights on the principles governing relationships, especially the intimate life within marriage, are found in the divinely inspired poetry of the Song of Solomon.

Match the verses in Column A with the characteristics of intimate relationships found in Column B.

Column A	Column B
a. Song of Sol. 1:9, 14, 16; 2:3; 4:1, 3, 7; 5:10-16; 6:9; 7:1.	__Expressing commitment.
b. Song of Sol. 1:15, 2:14, 4:9, 5:12, 6:5.	__Being totally honest, open, vulnerable with each other.
c. Song of Sol. 1:2, 2:6, 7:8, 8:3.	__Using terms of endearment, expressing appreciation, giving affirmation and honest compliments.
d. Song of Sol. 1:6, 2:2, 6:5, 8:10.	__Communicating face to face, making eye contact.
e. Song of Sol. 2:10-13, 17; 7:11, 12.	__Treating each other as friends.
f. Song of Sol. 5:16.	__Spending time together, playing together.
g. Song of Sol. 2:16; 6:3; 8:6, 7.	__Showing feelings through touch.

The Song of Solomon reflects upon the love between Solomon and a woman called “Shulamite” or “Shulamith,” who evidently was his first true love and leading queen (*Song of Sol.* 6:9, 13). The poem emphasizes aspects of their love rather than a chronological history of their relationship.

God draws back the curtain on marital intimacy. Through the experiences of this couple, the Bible presents the relationship principles involved in forming close friendships and in fashioning the intimate love and covenant commitment of marriage. God Himself chose marriage as a figure of His relationship with His people. Thus, the discoveries of love in this poem afford priceless insights into the grandest love relationship of all—the bond between Christ and the soul.

Why is it important to address the *heart* as well as the *head* in understanding relationships?

The Divine Parent and Marriage Partner

What family terms and imagery are applied to God in the following sets of texts? *Isa. 54:5, 62:5, Jer. 31:32 and Isa. 66:12, 13; Jer. 31:9; Hos. 11:1.*

God refers to Himself as the Husband of Israel. The imagery is repeated in the New Testament, where Christ is the Bridegroom and His bride is the church. God also is represented in Scripture as a parent, usually as a father, though some of the comparisons are maternal; for example “like a woman in childbirth” (*Isa. 42:14, NIV*) or as a “hen gathereth her chickens under her wings” (*Matt. 23:37*).

Gazing upon the perfect Marriage Partner and Parent. Watching others is one of the main ways human beings learn. In His Word God permits us to gaze upon Him as the perfect expression of love in marriage and parenting. The family metaphors for God show us more of what our families can be like. They also have the effect of drawing us closer to Him as we come to know Him in family terms.

Principles for study. Comparisons that liken God to a husband or parent contain valuable principles for us to study. They are not intended, however, to be literal blueprints for the responsibilities of married partners or parents. The scriptural imagery is frequently tied to local customs. For example, in Ezekiel 16:6-14, God’s association with Israel is likened to the betrothal and marital customs of the time when a groom spread his garment over the bride, and she, in turn, was washed, anointed, and adorned in preparation for the wedding festivities. More important, the analogies are limited, because humans are not God. All human attempts at intimacy pale into insignificance when compared to the constancy, faithfulness, and closeness God displays toward those He loves. Yet, we are hopeful, for God has been revealed in Jesus Christ. He beckons us to love as He loved and to be empowered for such loving through the gift of His Spirit.

What other Bible images of God might be helpful to those whose memories or experiences in a marriage or with parents make these family metaphors painful for them? See, for instance, Ps. 18:2, John 10:11, 15:5.

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “Bible Biographies,” *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, pp. 9–15; *Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 19–22.

Selecting relevant Scripture. Though the Scriptures are the basis for understanding God’s plan for family living, not every statement applies literally to all people in all eras, such as the death penalty for a rebellious son (*Deut. 21:18-21*) or for a wife who had been sexually promiscuous before marriage (*Deut. 22:20, 21*).

Detecting God’s will for families as revealed in Scripture today involves:

- ❶ Studying the theological and historical context of the message
- ❷ Determining the original meanings of words
- ❸ Comparing texts on a topic with other similar passages, looking for corroboration by other Scripture writers, and understanding the application and adaptation made by New Testament writers of Old Testament material
- ❹ Discovering broad-based principles and even details that apply to today’s family issues

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ As a class, discuss this question: If there is any one factor that is crucial to a healthy family, what is it? Is there more than one factor? If so, what are they?
- ❷ As a class, go through some of the imagery used to describe how God relates to us. Who in the class prefers certain images over others, and why? What should these different preferences tell us about how God relates to different people?

Summary: Scripture employs a variety of means to convey instruction for family living. These include God’s direct commands, various marriage and family examples, proverbs describing relationship principles, and His own modeling as a divine Husband and Parent. Nurtured and guided by such revelation, family members grow closer to Him and to one another.

Like Sheep Among Wolves*

by JEANE ZACHARY

The Waldensian Christians suffered persecution and death at the hands of the religious majority in Europe, beginning in the thirteenth century. They lived in secluded regions and dedicated themselves to sharing the truths of God with their neighbors in spite of the dangers they faced. Many became door-to-door salespersons in order to search for honest-hearted people with whom to share their beliefs. When they discovered someone who was open to God's message, they shared precious portions of Scripture with them.

Today modern Adventists are using similar techniques to bring Christ to unentered areas of Southeast Asia where few Christians live. These Adventists volunteer to live and work in unentered communities where they daily face the threat of persecution. For this reason we will not reveal their location.

The work is rigorous, and most of the volunteers are young people. So, the program's leaders were surprised when Jaibi, well beyond her youth, volunteered to go to a distant unentered community to work. She knew that she would receive housing but would have to earn her income by selling health books. She was so determined to go that she shared her excitement with friends. By the time she left, she had recruited 40 other volunteers to go with her.

Jaibi was asked to supervise her large team. As the group prayed and worked together, the Holy Spirit opened door after door. They found the community happy to learn the health principles the volunteers taught. Friendships developed, and soon small groups formed. It was not long before the volunteers called a pastor to prepare their interests for baptism.

Jaibi continued working in the village far beyond her one-year contract. In three years she and her team had planted five new congregations, a feat that could never have happened through public evangelism.

The strength of the Waldensian-style program lies in three things: Door-to-door visits, offering people valuable health materials; developing friendships that open the way for small groups to study the Bible; and the power of the Holy Spirit to open doors and bring conviction to people.

Some volunteers who came with Jaibi have returned to their homes, but others have joined her in this work. So far Jaibi and her team of volunteers have just witnessed an additional 105 persons baptized as the result of the blessing of the Lord on their work.

The inspiring example of the ancient Waldensian volunteers who spread the gospel through Europe as merchant-evangelists lives on today in Southeast Asia.

* See Matthew 10:16.

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