

Disciples Making Disciples



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Exod. 29:38-42; Prov. 1:8; 22:6; Matt. 28:18, 19; John 8:31; 13:35; Rom. 8:28; Eph. 6:1-4.*

Memory Text: “‘All your children shall be taught by the Lord, and great shall be the peace of your children’ ” (*Isaiah 54:13, NKJV*).

The Week at a Glance: Parents are called to lead their children to embrace godly values and to introduce them to the Lord.

Like an Olympic runner passing a torch, Moses sought to put faith in the hands of those who followed him. One thing was clear to Moses: Home is irreplaceable as a setting in which parents and children grasp faith in God, live it, and hold on to it. The greatness of the nation depends upon faithfulness to God's Word at home. Throughout its pages the Bible is concerned with enabling children to receive the heritage of faith of their parents and grandparents. Themes of Deuteronomy echo in Proverbs and Ephesians. These all offer guidance and hope to parent disciples who would make disciples of their children.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, February 4.*

Parent Disciples

Jesus commissioned His followers to go everywhere and make disciples. Earlier, He had defined what He meant by disciple. Study the definitions Jesus gave. In what way does His teaching about making disciples and being disciples help define the mission of the Christian home? *Matt. 28:18, 19; John 8:31; 13:35; compare Deut. 6:6-9.*

A disciple is one who follows his master's teaching (*John 8:31*). This kind of disciple is formed by sharing the truths of Christ so another person absorbs them. Elsewhere, Jesus defined disciples as individuals who know how to love others (*John 13:35*). Making disciples by this definition means helping people become the kind of individuals who love God and love people.

Parents as disciple makers. The family is a natural place to carry out Jesus' marching orders. Parents have a mission to attract children to Jesus and to invite them to be His disciples. Both definitions for making and being disciples apply to the Christian home. Family is the primary place in which children absorb truths and values. It is also in their families that children get their first messages about love and loving. A loving relationship with parents who dearly love Jesus and bring that love into their relationships with others increases the likelihood that a child will grow up loving Jesus and others too. Such children are apt to be more successful with their own children and likely will be able to form friendships that most naturally lead to fruitful witnessing.

What is the prerequisite for parents before attempting to guide children spiritually? *Deut. 6:5, 6; compare Deut. 6:18.*

Why is it more important to rear children to know a perfect Savior than to rear *perfect* children? Think about your personal experience with the good news of the gospel. What is your testimony of faith you would like your children to know about?

Spiritual Education at Home

How does Moses convey the all-important need for parents to focus their attention on sharing God’s truth with their children? *Deut. 6:7*. What special challenges face latter-day parents who stand near the border of the heavenly Promised Land?

“Teach diligently” or “impress” (*NIV*) is the same as “whet” (*Deut. 32:41*) or “sharpen” (*NIV*). As mothers and fathers share their spiritual experience with their sons and daughters, they “sharpen” these young “arrows” and help prepare them for the spiritual challenges they will face. The pairs of expressions “sit”—“walk” and “lie down”—“get up” convey that the sharing is incessant and persistent and involved with all life’s activities. Faith sharing takes time.

What does Solomon say is the intent of his parental instruction? *Prov. 2:1-9, 3:5-8*.

The passing of faith to the next generation is not an exact science. Even godly, attentive parents understand that they can perform only half the task. As youth mature they make choices and, ultimately, will assemble their own set of values. Christian parents do want their children to have freedom of choice but sometimes fear that their children might not make responsible choices. Proverbs pleads with youth to learn from their elders, to lay aside their youthful invincibility and self-sufficiency—their “own understanding”—and give God the control of their lives. Yet, Proverbs also upholds human freedom of choice and repeatedly endeavors to engage the minds and hearts of young people so they will choose God’s way.

Contemporary research has demonstrated an unfavorable comparison between the amount of focused attention given by parents to their children (sometimes only seconds per day) and the amount of time children spend with television, video games, and computers. What can parents do to make a difference? Is *quality time* the answer? How do parents compete with *high-tech* toys and television or anything else that steals time that could be better spent?

Family Worship

What experience of morning and evening worship did God's people have in Old Testament times? *Exod. 29:38-42*. What spiritual lessons can we, today, draw from this ancient practice of the Israelites?

The offering of a yearling lamb morning and evening at the temple took place at regular times each day when the Israelites worshiped the Lord. At these times they remembered their covenant history and expressed anew their faith in God as their Savior. Every sacrifice prefigured the death of Christ, the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world (*Rev. 13:8*). "In this custom Christians have an example for morning and evening prayer. While God condemns a mere round of ceremonies, without the spirit of worship, He looks with great pleasure upon those who love Him, bowing morning and evening to seek pardon for sins committed and to present their requests for needed blessings."—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 354.

Prayer is so important for family life. The members of such families, drawn close by a common faith, gain strength from one another in fighting the battles of life. They experience a peace that is unknown in families that have not made Christ the center of their lives. Surveys of youth indicate that regular worship at home with their family does enhance the quality of their spiritual development and increase the likelihood they will accept their parents' values and continue their family's heritage of faith.

The best time of the day. Ellen White offers the hope that family worship can be the best time of the day when it is regular, "short and spirited," "intensely interesting," and "full of life."—*Child Guidance*, pp. 521, 522. Family worship should be varied from time to time. It can include a few Bible verses and brief comments, time for the young to ask questions, singing, prayer, and parental sharing of their stories of faith. Children should have a part in the selection and presentation of Scripture, stories, songs, and other activities.

When were some of your most memorable experiences with family worship? What can parents do to create more of these memorable experiences? How do children's questions provide opportunities for faith sharing?

Winsome Witness to Your Child

Read Proverbs 22:6. What principle is expressed here?

The words *train up* are closely related to a word for “initiate,” which describes the way a midwife helped a newborn, reluctant to take the mother’s breast. By rubbing the baby’s gums with a tasty substance like date juice, she started the sucking response. “The way” likely means “the way he *ought* to go”; as in “the way of wisdom” and “right paths” (*Prov. 4:11, 2:20*), though it has become popular in Christian child-rearing literature to read “his way” or “the way he should go” as “according to his individual aptitude.” Taken together, the verse conveys the thought that, like the midwife luring the infant into taking the mother’s milk, parenting children and adolescents is about making godly values winsome and attractive, creating a thirst for spiritual things youth will find irresistible.

Some parents whose children have rejected their beliefs feel anxious or guilty when they read Proverbs 22:6. They assume their son’s or daughter’s loss of spiritual interest was caused by their poor parenting. Proverbs, however, presents *probabilities* rather than *promises*. This proverb is not intended to imply that the future choices of children *always* will be in line with their upbringing, whether that upbringing was wholesome or unwholesome. Rather than taxing parents with the impossible weight of moral responsibility for their child’s future (which is the responsibility of the adult child), the proverb conveys the thought that wholesome attitudes toward spiritual things, developed in childhood, tend to linger into maturity.

What kind of practical advice and encouragement would you give to some parents whose older children have wandered from the Lord? How might the following texts, and the principles behind them, be of help? *Luke 15:11-22, Rom. 8:28, 2 Pet. 3:9, Rev. 16:7.*

A Service of Love

What is the counsel in Ephesians to children? What are the unique features of the parenting instruction that follows? How are these two ideals related to each other? *Eph. 6:1-4*.

The validity of the commandment to “‘honor your father and mother’” (*NIV*) continues for Christians. The plural “parents” (*Eph. 6:1*) indicates that the child honors both. A mutual partnership in parenting is in view here; mothers are not to bear the responsibility alone. The apostle adds a qualifier to a child’s obedience—the phrase “in the Lord.” Children are not expected to obey those commands or expectations of their parents that are contrary to the Christian faith (*compare Acts 5:29*).

The overall instruction to parents surely applies to both fathers and mothers, but “fathers” is specifically used. This may be because the management and discipline of the household typically rested with them or because, as was the case with fathers then and now, their parenting style and use of power could exasperate and embitter their offspring.

“Exasperate” (*Eph. 6:4, NIV*) means “to rouse to wrath, to provoke, exasperate, anger.” Parents must be sensitive to the individual emotional needs of their adolescent children and accompany their regulations by relationship building. “Nurture and admonition,” or “training and instruction” (*NIV*), express the intention that children are to be reared in a manner that includes discipline *and* godly values.

Here again is a qualifying phrase—“of the Lord.” The parenting described in these verses is Christian in nature, and its most significant task is helping children to have a relationship with God and an appreciation of eternal things. The teaching of Jesus shapes Christian parenting. Christian parenting, as described in these verses, is a service of love that Christian mothers and fathers render to their children.

What is your relationship to your parents? What changes might you need to make in order to be sure that you are, indeed, honoring them?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “Responsibility for Eternal Interests,” “Every Home a Church,” “Leading Little Children to Christ,” “Preparing for Church Membership,” *Child Guidance*, pp. 471–502; “Blessing the Children,” *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 511–517.

A sacred trust from father to son. “In his childhood, Joseph had been taught the love and fear of God. Often in his father’s tent, under the Syrian stars, he had been told the story of the night vision at Bethel, of the ladder from heaven to earth, and the descending and ascending angels, and of Him who from the throne above revealed Himself to Jacob. He had been told the story of the conflict beside the Jabbok, when, renouncing cherished sins, Jacob stood conqueror, and received the title of a prince with God. . . .

“By communion with God through nature and the study of the great truths handed down as a sacred trust from father to son, he had gained strength of mind and firmness of principle.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 52.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ If some people in class are willing, have them talk about their relationship with their parents and/or children and what things they have learned from those experiences that could help others in the class better relate to either their parents or children.
- ❷ What special stresses in values transmission to children are faced by parents in troubled marriages, by single parents, or by those who are married to non-Christians or members of other faiths? How might your class be of practical help in such situations?

Summary: The passing of faith to the next generation is a concern expressed throughout Scripture. When vibrant faith in God and His Word is found first in parents, it manifests itself in every aspect of their life with their children.

Louder Than Words

by GAIL SCHATZSCHNEDIER

“We want Arshad! We want ADRA!” the Muslim villagers demanded to the government official. But who was Arshad, and what was ADRA? The Pakistani official did not know. He had come to the village to inquire why the villagers had refused to allow their children to be vaccinated against a serious outbreak of polio.

For 10 years the villagers had allowed Arshad Inayat and his team of ADRA workers to enter their villages in southern Pakistan. They knew Arshad, and they trusted him to vaccinate the children. But when funding ran out, Arshad and the ADRA workers had to stop their work. Then a serious outbreak of polio erupted, and the children needed vaccinations. In desperation the government official told his assistants, “Go find Arshad, and find ADRA!”

The government health officials called Karachi Adventist Hospital and found Arshad. They told him the problem and pleaded with him to return to the village and vaccinate the children.

When Arshad returned to the villages, the Muslim women asked him, “Where have you been? We have prayed to Allah for you to return.” Arshad vaccinated the children, and with funds from other countries, he installed hand pumps for the wells that his team constructed in the rural villages that had no water.

Sometime later Arshad and a government official entered the courtyard of a mullah, a Muslim holy man. Hundreds of Muslims had come to see this man and ask for his blessings. Many had brought offerings of cattle and sheep. When the government official introduced Arshad, the mullah replied, “Yes, I know you.” Then the mullah turned to the waiting people and said, “Mr. Arshad is a Christian man. He has helped our poor, vaccinated their children against diseases. He has taught them how to be healthy and has drilled wells in the villages that had no water.” Then the mullah asked the crowd, “What have you done for the poor?” The mullah continued to chide the waiting crowd for neglecting the poor.

In Pakistan, Christians are not allowed to speak to Muslims about their belief in Christ. But this mullah had spoken in Arshad’s stead. As an astonished Arshad listened, this mullah had told the crowd more than Arshad ever dared say on behalf of Christ.

Arshad’s quiet, faithful deeds had not gone unnoticed. In fact, they had spoken louder than words.

When GAIL SCHATZSCHNEDIER wrote this story, she was director of community health services for Karachi Adventist Hospital in Pakistan.