

Families of Faith



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *John 1:12, 13; 3:7; Acts 10:1-28, 34, 35; 1 Cor. 2:2; 1 Thess. 5:21, 22; 1 John 5:1.*

Memory Text: “Therefore . . . let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith, who for the joy that was set before Him endured the cross, despising the shame, and has sat down at the right hand of the throne of God” (*Hebrews 12:1, 2, NKJV*).

The Week at a Glance: Families face a lot of cultural pressures; the power of the gospel can allow them to confront those pressures victoriously.

And this gospel of the kingdom shall be preached in all the world for a witness unto all nations” (*Matt. 24:14*). We, living in the early twenty-first century, have the opportunity to see this prophecy being fulfilled in a way that earlier generations could not. Of course, as the gospel is spreading into new lands, new cultures, it meets with various traditions and practices, some of which might fit nicely with the truths given to us by God about families; while others, in contrast, might be in conflict with these truths in marked ways.

Regardless, though, of the culture in which the gospel is preached and lived, Christian families confront cultural challenges all the time. The great news is that the power of the gospel gives us light, comfort, and strength to deal with these challenges and to be “families of faith.”

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 11.*

Hold Fast What Is Good

As the gospel circles the globe, Christians encounter different cultures and practices, many of which pertain to family and social relationships. One of the great questions for Christian missionaries regards how they should relate to various cultural norms about many things, including family relationships they might personally find uncomfortable.

Read Acts 10:1-28, 34, 35. What can we learn here about our need to overcome our own barriers and prejudices when dealing with other cultures?

Christ's death was for the sins of every human being everywhere. Many people simply do not know this great truth yet. To bring this news with an invitation to respond is the evangelistic mission of Christians. Because God shows no partiality, Christians are called to treat everyone with respect and integrity, giving them a chance to embrace the good news that is for them, as well.

What conclusions did early Christian missionaries reach regarding the presentation of the gospel to other cultures? What principle can we draw from these texts? Acts 15:19, 20, 28, 29; 1 Cor. 2:2; 1 Thess. 5:21, 22.

Though every culture mirrors the fallen condition of the people within it, cultures also may have beliefs that are compatible with Scripture, even useful to the cause of the gospel. The value placed upon close relationships in family and community in many parts of the world is an example. Christians can uphold and strengthen that which is good and in keeping with biblical principles.

At the same time, God's truth must not be compromised. Church history sadly shows that compromise and accommodation to cultures have yielded a patchwork of pseudo-Christian beliefs posing as authentic Christianity. Satan claims to be the god of this world and happily spreads confusion, but Jesus has redeemed this world, and His Spirit guides His followers into all truth (*John 16:13*).

How much of your faith is shaped by your culture, and how much is biblical truth? How can you learn to discern between the two? Be prepared to discuss your answer in class.

The Power of Culture on Family

“For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment; that the Lord may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him” (Gen. 18:19).

Though they might come in various configurations, families are the building blocks of society; thus, many distinct cultural traits of various societies are directly tied to family. For instance, in one ancient culture it was deemed a man’s responsibility to eat the corpse of his dead parents; in another, a man who wanted a bride had to bring her father a dowry of shrunken heads from a rival tribe. Even in modern times, ideas relating to children, courtship, divorce, marriage, parents, and so forth vary widely. As we spread our message to these various cultures, we have to learn how to relate to them in ways that, while not compromising our beliefs, do not cause unnecessary problems. At the same time, and closer to home, we have to be very aware of just what cultural influences impact our families.

In what ways did culture impact family life in the following examples? What principles can we learn from these examples?

Gen. 16:1-3

Gen. 35:1-4

Ezra 10

1 Kings 11:1

None of us lives in a vacuum; all of us and our families are impacted by the culture in which we live. Our responsibility as Christians is to exist within our culture the best we can, keeping that which is in harmony with our faith, while shunning, as much as possible, that which conflicts with it.

What things in your particular culture are helpful to family life and in harmony with the Bible? What things are not? How can you best adapt your faith to your culture without compromising essential truths?

Sustaining Families Through Seasons of Change

Change is an inescapable, unsettling occurrence in families, regardless of whatever culture they live in. Some change is related to predictable passage through the life cycle. Often change is unpredictable; such as deaths, disasters, wars, illnesses, family moves, or career failures. Many families face economic and social changes in their communities and countries. Other changes are directly related to the culture.

Below are some examples of great, even traumatic, changes people faced. Using your imagination, put yourself in their positions. How did these changes impact their family life? What mechanism would you have needed in order to help cope? In what ways might you have reacted differently?

1 Abraham, Sarah, and Lot (*Gen. 12:1-5*)

2 Hadassah (*Esther 2:7-9*)

3 Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah (*Dan. 1:1-21*)

With change comes the experience of loss and the anxiety of uncertainty as to one's immediate future. Depending on a family's ability to adjust to changes, these experiences can propel people to new levels of growth and appreciation for spiritual things, or they can lead to stress and anxiety. Satan exploits the disruption that changes bring, hoping to introduce doubt and distrust in God. The promises of God's Word, the resources of family and friends, and the assurance that their lives were in God's hands helped many heroes and heroines of faith cope successfully with momentous life upheaval.

If you know someone (or even a whole family) who is facing a traumatic change, do something in a practical way to give them some help and encouragement.

Toward a First-Generation Faith

What crisis of faith developed in Israel after Joshua and his peers died? *Judg. 2:7-13.*

Studies of how values and beliefs in organizations, such as churches, are transmitted to subsequent generations show that the founders have very high levels of commitment to the beliefs. They were the ones who first championed them. Within a generation or two, many lose sight of the principles behind the values. They may go along with the organization but often from habit. In subsequent generations, habits tend to crystallize into traditions. The founders' passion is no longer present.

It has been said that God has no grandchildren, only children. What do you think that means? *See also John 1:12, 13; 3:7; 1 John 5:1.*

A common approach to transmitting values through long generations of Christianity has been for older ones simply to tell the youth what they believe. Learning what one's parents believe or what the church believes is not personal faith, however. Being a Christian is more than belonging to an organization with a history and a dogma. True faith is not something genetic, is not something that is passed on naturally from one generation to another. Each one needs to know Christ for himself or herself. Parents can do only so much. The church, as a whole, and parents in particular, need to do all they can to create an environment that will make young people want to make that right choice, but, in the end, a generation is saved or lost for the gospel one person at a time.

Joe, coming out of atheism, joined the Seventh-day Adventist Church as an adult after a powerful conversion experience. He married an Adventist woman and had a few children, whom they, of course, raised in the faith. One day, thinking about the spiritual condition of his children, he said, "Oh, if only my children would have the experience that I had!" If you had been there, what would you have said to him?

Twenty-first-Century Runners

In his popular Bible paraphrase *The Message*, Eugene Peterson uses *message* wherever the biblical word for “gospel” appears. The good news about Jesus is truly the *message* still needed by the world today. Christian families are called to experience it together and to share it in whatever culture they live.

How would you summarize “the message” using the following texts?
Matt. 28:5-7; John 3:16; Rom. 1:16, 17; 1 Cor. 2:2; 2 Cor. 5:18-21.

The earliest news with which the disciples ran everywhere was of the resurrection of Jesus. Christian families today join a long line of runners, proclaiming, “He is risen, as he said” (*Matt. 28:7*). The reality of His resurrection makes credible everything else Jesus said about Himself, about God and His love for sinners, about forgiveness, and about the assurance of eternal life by faith in Him.

Passionate about the gospel. Scripture gives glimpses of the gospel’s sweeping effect on the lives of Jesus’ early followers. They opened their homes for Bible study; they prayed and ate together, shared money and resources, and took care of one another. Whole households embraced the message. Were they suddenly flawless people? No. Were there some conflicts and discord among them? Yes. But somehow these followers of Christ were different. They acknowledged their needs for God and for one another. They put a priority on unity and harmony at home and at church, endeavoring to fulfill the Gethsemane prayer of Jesus (*John 17:20-23*). They witnessed to one another and to unbelievers with boldness, even putting their lives at risk for their beliefs.

So must it be for us. Even in the current age, jaundiced as it is toward godly things, people who are excited about something still get a hearing. The Spirit longs to fill human hearts with excitement about the gospel. When the good news really becomes as good in our hearts as it is within the Word, sharing will be spontaneous and unstoppable.

What changes might need to be made in your own family that could help it become a better harbinger of the *message* we have been called to share?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “In the Court of Babylon,” *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 479–490; *Gospel Workers*, pp. 325–332; “Rejoicing in the Lord,” *Steps to Christ*, pp. 115–126.

No respecter of persons. “The religion of Christ uplifts the receiver to a higher plane of thought and action, while at the same time it presents the whole human race as alike the objects of the love of God, being purchased by the sacrifice of His Son. At the feet of Jesus, the rich and the poor, the learned and the ignorant, meet together, with no thought of caste or worldly preeminence. All earthly distinctions are forgotten as we look upon Him whom our sins have pierced. The self-denial, the condescension, the infinite compassion of Him who was highly exalted in heaven, puts to shame human pride, self-esteem, and social caste. Pure, undefiled religion manifests its heaven-born principles in bringing into oneness all who are sanctified through the truth. All meet as blood-bought souls, alike dependent upon Him who has redeemed them to God.”—Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, p. 330.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 As a class, discuss your answers to the questions in Sunday’s study.
- 2 What principles can we find from the Ellen G. White quote above that, if applied, would revolutionize our family lives?
- 3 How well has your local church done in nurturing the younger generation of believers? What can you as a class do to help the church in this important task?

Summary: The earliest evangelists understood that God shows no partiality with people. The gospel belongs to all, and every culture must hear it, as uncomplicated by the cultural trappings of the carriers as possible. The good news introduces radical change, working strategically but surely in the hearts of individuals and families.

Delayed Delivery

by KRISTINA MUEHLHAUSER

Our home in Uganda was chaotic as we prepared to leave for a few weeks' vacation. In the busyness of life, I asked God to help us not to miss opportunities to be a blessing to others.

Then Lucy, my language teacher, called me to attend the birth of her grandchild. I hopped on my bicycle and pedaled through the dusty streets to the hospital. I found the expectant mother, Christine, lying on a bed in the maternity ward, surrounded by other women in labor. Christine was not in true labor yet, but I hesitated to leave.

Darkness fell. Lucy and I lay down to rest on a thin mat on the cold cement floor. The sheet that covered us was inadequate. I slept fitfully.

In the morning I hurried home to finish packing for our trip. Several times I returned to the hospital to check on Christine's progress. Still no baby. I feared I would have to leave before the baby was born. Finally Christine's labor started in earnest. She paced the floor, moaning and crying in pain. I could not sleep. At dawn, she still had not dilated completely, and my plane would leave in three hours.

I hurried home and told my husband to meet me at the hospital on the way to the airport. Then I hurried back to the hospital. Christine was exhausted, and the doctors were concerned that the baby would die if not delivered quickly. I had to leave, but Christine clung to me, begging me to stay.

I ran outside and told my family to go check in for the flight, that I would take a *boda boda* to the airport. Then I ran into the hospital.

Holding Christine's head, I whispered, "You can do it. Push!" She pushed with more strength than she had.

The phone in my pocket rang. It was my son. "Mom, the plane is due any minute!" I did not dare look back. Choking back sobs, I raced toward the street and hailed a *boda boda* driver to rush me to the airport. As we raced through the streets tears streaked my face.

I arrived at the airport and boarded the small plane. We roared into the air. God, I cried, You are all powerful. Please take care of them. When we arrived at the airport, I called home. Christine had delivered just minutes after I left.

I am back home in Uganda, and I have visited Christine and held her beautiful little boy. Thank You, God, for letting me be a part of their lives.

KRISTINA MUEHLHAUSER is a midwife. She and her husband, Darrel, work for the South Sudan Field from Arua, Uganda.