

What Have They Seen *in* Your House?



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Isaiah 38; 39; 58:6, 7, 10-12; 1 Cor. 7:12-15; Heb. 6:12; 13:7; 1 Pet. 3:1, 2; 3 John 11.*

Memory Text: “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (1 Peter 2:9, NIV).

The Week at a Glance: The home life of Christians can be a powerful evangelistic resource.

Emissaries from Babylon came to King Hezekiah of Judah to hear firsthand about his miraculous recovery. Hezekiah happily received these guests with a tour that showcased his armory and expansive treasure. When they were gone, the prophet Isaiah confronted him with a penetrating question: “ ‘What have they seen in your house?’ ” (*Isa. 39:4, NKJV*).

What a question! Suppose that were asked of us? What have people seen in our house? What have heavenly angels seen? What does anyone see when walking in the door? What kind of spirit permeates our residences? Can one *smell* the scent of prayer? Is there kindness, generosity, love? Will someone who is there walk away thinking Jesus is in this home?

Let us dedicate our home life to Him and seek guidance in order that our homes may bring glory to God.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 18.*

Learning From a King's Mistake

Review the account of Hezekiah's healing and the visit of the Babylonian ambassadors (*2 Chron. 32:25, 31; Isaiah 38; 39*).

Scripture points out that the messengers are interested in the miraculous recovery of King Hezekiah. However, Hezekiah seems to be silent about his healing experience. He does not emphasize the things that would have opened the hearts of these inquiring ambassadors to the knowledge of the true God. The contrast between his gratitude for being healed in chapter 38 and his silence about it in chapter 39 is striking.

"*God left him to test him.*" This state visit is a most significant occasion; yet, there is no record of Hezekiah seeking special guidance about it in prayer, from prophets, or from priests. Nor does God intervene. Alone, out of the public eye, with no consultation with spiritual advisers, the work of God in his life and in the life of his nation seems to recede from his mind. The intent of the historian in 2 Chronicles 32:31 may have been to show how easily God's blessing can be taken for granted and how prone the recipients of His mercy are to becoming self-sufficient.

Below are some lessons about faithfulness in home life that can be gleaned from the experience of Hezekiah. What others can you think of?

① Every visit to the homes of Christians is an opportunity for people to meet followers of Christ.

② Few visitors are likely to open conversation about spiritual things. Christians must find ways that are sensitive and appropriate to the occasion to share the good news.

③ Christians are not called to show off their material prosperity or accomplishments, though they may recognize these as blessings from God. They are called to "declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (*1 Pet. 2:9, NIV*) or, to use Hezekiah's experience as a symbol, to declare that they were dying, but Christ has healed them; they were dead in sin, and Christ resurrected them and seated them in heavenly places (*Eph. 2:4-6*).

In what ways are you able to use your home to witness to others? How could you share your faith in Christ more forthrightly with visitors to your home?

Family First

The most natural first recipients of our gospel-sharing endeavors are the people in our households. There is no more important mission field than this.

What conclusions can be drawn from **John 1:40-42** about sharing faith at home? *See also Deut. 6:6, 7; Ruth 1:14-18.*

An enthusiastic report. Andrew went beyond mere reporting; he arranged for his brother, Simon, to meet Jesus. An enthusiastic report about Jesus and an introduction to Him as a Person—what a simple formula for sharing the gospel with relatives in our homes! After the introduction Andrew stepped back. From then on, Jesus and Peter had a relationship of their own.

Helping children to a place of faith. Children in a home can often be overlooked as fitting recipients of gospel-sharing efforts. Parents mistakenly assume children simply will absorb family spirituality. This must not be taken for granted. While children and young people learn from the modeling they observe, it is also true these younger members of the Lord's family need individual attention and opportunity to be introduced personally to Him. Deuteronomy 6 is insistent on this point: Attention must be given to the most effective kind of religious education. Regular spiritual habits of personal and family worship are to be encouraged in the home. Time and earnest efforts must be put forth on behalf of children and youth.

What can we learn from the evangelistic efforts of Naomi? *Ruth 1:8-22.*

Ruth saw Naomi at the lowest of moments: when she tried to push her daughter-in-law away and when, bitter and depressed and overwhelmed by grief as she recounted her losses (*Ruth 1:15, 20, 21*). No more eloquent testimony than Ruth's can be given to show that youth can meet and make a commitment to a perfect God, even when introduced to Him by an imperfect parent.

How does the notion of home as the most important mission field affect your attitude toward the people who live with you? Work together as a family to prepare a list of specific efforts your family can make to lead unsaved relatives to Christ.

Peace That Wins

What counsel does the New Testament have for marriages divided by religion? *1 Cor. 7:12-15; 1 Pet. 3:1, 2.*

The blessing of being a Christian partner. In 1 Corinthians Paul responds to converts' concerns that staying married to an unbelieving spouse might be offensive to God or bring defilement upon themselves and their children. Not so, says Paul. The sacred state of marriage and its intimacies are to continue after a partner's conversion. The presence of one Christian partner "sanctifies" the other partner and the couple's children. The word *sanctifies* should be understood in the sense that unbelieving spouses come into contact with the blessings of grace through living with their Christian partners.

Heartrending as it is, the unbelieving partner may decide to abandon the marriage. Though consequences will be serious, the merciful word of our God—who always upholds human freedom of choice—is "let him do so." The believer "is not bound in such circumstances" (*1 Cor. 7:15, NIV*).

Called to live in peace. The clear preference of the Word of God is that, despite the challenges of a spiritually divided home, a way might be found for the peace of Christ to reign there. The hope is to keep the marriage intact, to give evidence of the triumph of the gospel in the midst of difficulty, and to promote the comfort of the partner with whom the believer is one flesh, though he or she be unbelieving.

What might be the limitations of a spouse's responsibility toward a nonbelieving partner?

Lovingkindness, unwavering fidelity, humble service, and winsome witness on the part of the believer create the greatest likelihood of winning the non-Christian spouse. Submission in a Christian marriage arises out of reverence for Christ (*compare Eph. 5:21*). When a spouse relates with Christian submission to an unbelieving partner, the first allegiance is always to Christ. Faithfulness to the claims of God on one's life does not require a spouse to suffer abuse at the hands of a violent partner.

Is someone in your church struggling with an unbelieving spouse? If so, in what practical ways could you possibly help?

Family Life Is for Sharing

In the following verses, trace the New Testament uses of the words *follow* (KJV) or *imitate* (NIV). What do they tell us about the process of becoming and growing as a Christian? What do you think they suggest about the relationship between modeling and witnessing? *1 Cor. 4:16, Eph. 5:1, 1 Thess. 1:6, Heb. 6:12, 13:7, 3 John 11.*

The New Testament emphasis on *imitation* acknowledges the important role of modeling in the learning process. People tend to become like whom or what they watch. This principle applies to relationships generally and especially in the home, where imitation is common. There, children imitate their parents and siblings; married partners often imitate each other. This concept provides an important clue to how couples and families can bear Christian witness to other couples and families.

The power of social influence. We witness from our homes when we provide opportunities for others to observe us and to share in our home experience in some way. Many simply have no good example of marriage or family relationships to follow. In our homes they may see how the spirit of Jesus makes a difference. “Social influence,” wrote Ellen White, “is a wonderful power. We can use it if we will as a means of helping those about us.”—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 354.

As married couples invite other couples for meals, fellowship, or Bible study, or when they attend a marital-growth program together, the visitors see a model. The display of mutuality, affirmation, communication, conflict-resolution, and accommodation of differences testifies of family life in Christ.

In this context, however, of what must we always be careful? *Jer. 17:9, John 2:25, Rom. 3:23.*

Follow believers who follow Christ. All human examples are flawed; however, the witness of the Christian home is not about modeling absolute perfection. The New Testament notion of imitation is a call for individuals to follow believers who follow Christ. The idea is that individuals will grasp Christian faith as they see it demonstrated in the lives of others who are as human and fallible as they are.

What could you do to make your home a better model for Christian witnessing?

Centers of Contagious Friendliness

Compare biblical references on hospitality with actual incidents in the homes of several Bible families listed below. *Isa. 58:6, 7, 10-12; Rom. 12:13; 1 Pet. 4:9*. Note the attributes of hospitality that are demonstrated.

Abraham and Sarah (*Gen. 18:1-8*)

Rebekah and her family (*Gen. 24:15-20*)

Zacchaeus (*Luke 19:1-9*)

Hospitality meets another person's basic needs for rest, food, and fellowship. It is a tangible expression of self-giving love. Jesus attached theological significance to hospitality when He taught that feeding the hungry and giving drink to the thirsty were acts of service done to Him (*Matt. 25:34-40*). Using one's home for ministry may range from simply inviting neighbors to a meal to the radical hospitality of lending a room to an abuse victim. It may involve simple friendliness, an opportunity to offer prayer with someone, or the conducting of Bible studies. True hospitality springs from the hearts of those who have been touched by God's love and want to express their love in words and actions.

Families sometimes complain that they lack the facilities, the time, and/or the energy to offer hospitality. Others feel awkward, unskilled, and unsure about reaching beyond what is familiar in order to associate with unbelievers. Some wish to avoid the complications to their lives that may arise from becoming involved with others. Many contemporary families confuse *hospitality* and *entertaining*.

In what ways does your home life reflect your own spiritual condition?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “A Powerful Christian Witness,” “Attitude Toward an Unbelieving Companion,” *The Adventist Home*, pp. 35–39; pp. 348–352; “Ministry of the Home,” *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 349–355; “The Ambassadors From Babylon,” *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 340–348.

The power of the home in evangelism. “Far more powerful than any sermon that can be preached is the influence of a true home upon human hearts and lives. . . .

“Our sphere of influence may seem narrow, our ability small, our opportunities few, our acquirements limited; yet wonderful possibilities are ours through a faithful use of the opportunities of our own homes.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 352, 355.

Discussion Questions:

- ❶ Ask anyone in class if it were the influence of someone’s home that helped him or her make a decision for Christ. Discuss just what it was that made such an impression. What can the class learn from that experience?
- ❷ In what practical ways can you as a class minister to a family with an unbelieving spouse?
- ❸ As a class, talk about some of the pressures in the home that work against faith. Write up a list of some of these things; then across from them, write down possible solutions.

Summary: The private lives of Christians are a means of witness to children, unbelieving spouses, other relatives, and visitors. While faith sharing at home may not always be as complete as one would like or result in the conversion of relatives and visitors, imperfect family members seek to point the way to a perfect Savior. Through generous hospitality, expressed in the Savior’s name, they bring within the realm of grace all whose lives they touch.

God Shall Provide

by SALNAVE RIARD

I loved sharing my faith with others and received little satisfaction from operating my small business. I felt God calling me to study theology at the Adventist university in Port-au-Prince, Haiti.

Finances were a problem. I did not earn enough to pay my tuition and eat. I gave my problems to God and focused on reaching others, and God blessed.

One day as I walked out of my house, I saw some people crying. They told me that a child had died. The mother and father led me to the child, about four years old, who lay limp and cold on the bed. His mother said that he had been sick for two days and had died some time later. I picked up the child and hugged him to my body. I prayed for God to help me, then I read Psalm 46: “God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way” (NIV). Then I knelt to pray.

“God, I present myself and this child to You. You can see his weeping family. Come to us, Lord, and show these people that You are God, that Your name will be praised.”

Suddenly someone shouted, “Pray, pray!” Then I felt a slight movement in my arms. He was alive! My prayers turned to praise as I thanked God for the life of the child. The child lay calmly in my arms as I praised God. Then I gave the child to his mother.

The family asked me what they owed me for bringing their child back to life. Shocked, I told them they owed me nothing, but they owed God their lives and their praise. He was the One who had saved the child’s life. I invited the family to visit the nearby Adventist church to listen to the message of God.



When I returned from holding meetings in southern Haiti, I visited the family and studied the Bible with them. At least one member of the family has become an Adventist.

I had been concerned about money, but God showed me that I could trust Him for everything. I quit fretting about my bills, and God provided a sponsor to help me through school. It is true what the Bible says, “My God shall provide all my needs.”

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