

A Family of Families



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 2:18-25; 27:1-28:5; Matt. 10:35-37; John 17:11, 21, 22; Acts 9:17; 21:8, 9; Rom. 16:1; 1 Cor. 4:14, 15; Gal. 4:5; 1 John 4:8, 16.*

Memory Text: “Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone” (*Ephesians 2:19, 20, NKJV*).

The Week at a Glance: Through our family, both in our households and in His church, God longs for us to experience His self-giving love.

Maurice and Sara, newly baptized Adventists who lived in a crime-ridden area, told the pastor they wanted to move to a safer place, one closer to the church, so their two daughters could attend church school. With their permission the pastor shared their hopes with the congregation. Before long a member spotted an empty apartment not far from the church. It was just what the family had been hoping for, but their hope fell at the news of the large security deposit. Telephones rang, and by the next day donations by church members helped Maurice and Sara make the deposit and the first month's rent. Church members cleaned both apartments and moved them across town. Exhausted but exhilarated, Maurice stood before the church the next Sabbath and beamed with gratitude. A man of few words, he said only, “I'm so glad I have a family!”

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, January 7.*

Family Roots

When He brought together the first man and the first woman in marriage in the Garden of Eden, the Creator formed the first family.

Study the origin of the family (*Gen. 2:18-25*). What purpose for the family is evident in this account?

“ ‘It is not good for the man to be alone’ ” (*Gen. 2:18, NIV*). Companionship is one of the first purposes of families. Scripture uses *family* and *household* to describe social units made up of relatives and sometimes domestic helpers, all dwelling together in companionship. Together, families fend off loneliness and provide for the needs of each person (*compare Lev. 25:49; Ruth 2:20; Ps. 68:5, 6*).

A special companionship. With the marriage of the first couple, God supplied a very special kind of companionship. He intended husbands and wives to experience a unique union He called “one flesh” (*Gen. 2:24*). To the married couple He entrusted another of His purposes for families—the bearing and rearing of children (*Gen. 1:28*).

What deeper meaning of the family emerges from reflection on the nature and Personhood of God and the creation of humankind in His image? *Gen. 1:26-28. Compare John 17:11, 21, 22; 1 John 4:8, 16.*

What we can see in Christ’s words is the unity and the loving relationship within the Godhead Itself. Think of the meaning and purpose this gives to life in our individual households, which, in their own way, can reflect the self-giving love seen within the Trinity! No wonder family becomes a major metaphor in the New Testament for the church, the household of faith (*Gal. 6:10*).

Companionship, we see, is one of the fundamental components of family life. How much time do you spend being a companion to other family members? What things should you give up that would allow you to spend more time with your family?

Key Text: *Genesis 1:27, 28*

Teachers Aims:

1. To show that families were established for companionship and were created to reflect the unity of the Godhead.
2. To establish the family as a means of experiencing and expressing God's love.
3. To explore the church as a unit of many families joined together.

Lesson Outline:

I. The First Family (*Gen. 2:18, 24*)

- A. The first family was established at Creation.
- B. Families were intended to meet our social needs.
- C. The first man and woman were created to be one flesh as the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit are One.
- D. The family should experience and reflect the love of God.

II. The Family as a Reflection of God's Love (*1 John 4:12*)

- A. Family members express love through their treatment of one another.
- B. Christ, our Example, expressed love for His mother, even at the cross.
- C. Love and obedience to God should be stronger than family ties.

III. God's Family Is a Family of Families (*Eph. 2:19*)

- A. The Bible reveals various kinds of family structures.
- B. Single people are a vital part of the family of God.
- C. In the church family, people should experience the love of God and have a sense of belonging.

Summary: God created families to fulfill our needs for companionship and community. Although there are various kinds of family structures, each one of them is to be a reflection of the love and of the character of God. Church-family members should experience oneness and express the love of God.

COMMENTARY

I. Introduction

While Scripture and Ellen White have given Adventists principles and directives for building healthy families, what has occurred in the wider culture also has influenced us. During the last 150 years, there have been major changes in what society expects from a family. Class members may have a more informed discussion of the Bible study guide if they are aware of some of these changes.

II. Transitions in Family Types

Prior to the Industrial Revolution in America and in Europe, the typical family was commonly called the *Institutional Family*. Such a family sought stability and security by stressing family loyalty,

Jesus' Affirmation of Families

What do the following texts tell us about Jesus' attitude toward family relationships?

Matt. 19:4-6

Mark 7:9-13

John 5:17, 18

John 19:26, 27

The divine plan for family living got a boost from the ministry of Jesus. He left no uncertainty about God's plan for marriage, especially when the Pharisees quizzed Him about divorce. The fifth commandment about honoring parents was in His mind as He rebuked the Pharisees who encouraged adult children to give as an offering the money that should have been spent upon their aging parents. Probably Jesus' greatest acknowledgment of the parent-child relationship came when He talked about God as His Father. On the cross He expressed love and care for His mother, Mary. During that terrible time He made sure the woman who had cradled Him, cherished Him, and, at times through the years, wondered at Him, got the best care He could give in the home of His trusted disciple.

Some statements of Jesus about families may need some clarification (*Matt. 10:35-37, Mark 3:32-35, Luke 9:59-62, 14:26*). **Why do you think Jesus said these things? How can they be reconciled with His approval elsewhere of family life?**

He who set people in families from the beginning did not change His mind about them during His earthly ministry. Just as He planned at Creation, the Son of God upheld them as sources of nurture, support, and strength. However important, families must be seen in the light of the higher loyalty to God.

Since God calls us to commitment to Him in both our church and family experience, how can energy, time, and resources be fairly distributed between these two? What dangers exist for those who, so busy in their work for God, neglect their family commitments?

the value of children, and community ties. The role of the father's authority also was important. Children most often were valued because of their work potential. The *Institutional Family* was well-suited for "a world of family farms, small family businesses, and tight communities bound together by a common religion."—William J. Doherty, *The Intentional Family: How to Build Family Ties in Our Modern World* (Reading, Mass.: Addison-Wesley, Inc., 1997), p. 4. This was the common family type during the time of James and Ellen White.

The Industrial Revolution started to change the *Institutional Family*, and, beginning in the 1920s, a new type of family system emerged. What Doherty termed the *Psychological Family* prized "personal achievement and happiness more than . . . family obligations and tight community bonds."—Page 4. The *Psychological Family* valued a secure married couple with close emotional ties, good communication in the family, and a working partnership in child rearing. The goal of such a family was that each member be satisfied with their roles.

Within the *Psychological Family*, there was a theoretical form of spousal equality. The wife was the expert with homemaking and child-rearing issues, while the husband was the expert outside the home. Both had equality, but satisfaction was more difficult to achieve.—Page 4.

The question facing many married couples was how to have one's personal needs met while maintaining an equal relationship. What emerged as the answer was learned communication skills, commitment, conflict resolution, and the ability to nurture and affirm each other. The high expectations for marriage, along with the realization that divorce no longer was a *social stigma*, resulted in many couples being overwhelmed by the *daily* nature of their marriages. These issues contributed greatly to both the cause and effect of increased divorce rates. "The cultural image of the two-parent nuclear family from cradle to grave splintered into a montage of family forms."—Page 6.

Societal revolutions and changes in the 1960s and in the 1970s led to the disintegration of the *Psychological Family*. This gave way to the emergence of the *Pluralistic Family*. Such a family is still common today in America and Europe. The *Pluralistic Family* claims that there is no ideal family. The traditional two-parent family is just one alternative among others, including cohabitation, single parenting, remarriage, and gay and lesbian families. *Flexibility* is the operative word in any debate on the subject.—Pages 6, 7.

The *Institutional Family* is closest to the biblical ideal. The *Psychological Family*, with its insistence on promoting the rights and freedoms of individuals, can be harmful to the "well-being of the family unit." Is this the best model for the Seventh-day Adventist family? Perhaps not!

A Variety of Families

Consider the various kinds of households in Bible times: Genesis 27:1–28:5; Ruth 1:22; 2:23; Jeremiah 16:2; Hosea 1:2, 3, 6, 8; 3:1-3. What others can you think of?

Isaac and Rebekah lived with their adult son, Jacob, and his married twin brother, Esau. The grieving widows Naomi and Ruth, bound together as mother and daughter-in-law, found refuge together. Jeremiah was single. Hosea parented his three children alone before he was reconciled to Gomer. Still other Bible families include the siblings Lazarus, Martha, and Mary, who had a home in Bethany where Jesus visited (*John 11:1-3, 20*); Aquila and Priscilla, married but apparently never had children (*Acts 18:2, 18; 1 Cor. 16:19*); and the family of grandmother Lois, her daughter Eunice, and grandson Timothy, in Lystra. Timothy's Greek father may have separated from the family as an unbeliever (*Acts 16:1, 2 Tim. 1:5; compare 1 Cor. 7:15*).

Acceptance of different family types. That God loved and cared about such diverse families is a source of abundant encouragement in our world today. It should also lead to appreciation of widely varied family types within His church.

What core values for family living are continually present in Scripture? *Gen. 2:24, 25; Exod. 20:14; Lev. 18:22; Prov. 5:18-20; Matt. 19:6; Rom. 1:26, 27; 1 Cor. 7:3-5; Heb. 13:4.*

God's gracious dealings throughout salvation history bear witness to His mercy toward humankind in a world distorted by sin, where the divine blueprint for families is rarely replicated. There are, however, certain core values that frequently appear throughout Scripture, intended to preserve and, where necessary, restore and elevate God's gift of sexuality to the human family. These values hold that sexual intimacy is a mutual expression of love reserved for the monogamous marriage of a man and a woman only (the Bible knows nothing of same-sex *marriages*). Many types of families in which a commitment to these values exists can be accommodated; yet relationships in which sexuality is otherwise expressed, or exploited, ultimately undermine God's design for marriage and degrade humanity.

Is there anyone in your church who is living in a household different from your own? How can you show this person, or such people, appreciation and support?

Certainly, the *Pluralistic Family* type also creates problems for Adventists. If there is a right way, there must be also a wrong way. How can we remain silent regarding family practices not supported by Scripture?

Family sociologists suggest another way. The *Intentional Family* calls for choices supported by grounded ethical and moral convictions that will shape family units for now and for eternity.—Pages 7, 8. This view challenges Adventist families to refocus on divine

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Genesis 1:26-28; 2:18-25; Ephesians 2:19, 20*

❶ Matthew 1 and Luke 3 trace Jesus' genealogy back to Abraham (*Matthew*) and Adam (*Luke*). As you skim through the lists, you'll find names both familiar and unfamiliar. And as you recall the Bible stories connected with each name, you'll remember episodes that were both heroic and shameful. What is the overriding point we should take from the stories of God's flawed family? What lessons can you apply to the people with whom you live and worship?

❷ God had high ideals when He created the first couple and established the first family. Make a list of the characteristics that, even in a perfect environment, were necessary for the success of a family. How were these characteristics altered by sin's entrance into the world? What are the remedies for those who want to get back to God's ideal?

❸ Give three examples from Christ's life and teachings that demonstrate His high regard for the family. How can these examples be translated into modern settings—especially those settings that are less than ideal?

❹ Think of the families represented in your congregation. Identify as many types of families as you can (divorced; widowed; never married; married, no children; retired; single parents; and others). Next, describe how ministries currently offered by your church can meet the spiritual, social, and material needs of those on your list. Imagine some ministries that might have to be developed to take up the slack.

❺ Read Romans 16:1-16. What is the sociological profile of the church in Rome? What do the individuals mentioned have in common? How is their role in the church affirmed by Paul?

One Is a Whole Number

When present households in the family of God are counted, those of single adults represent a large and growing segment. Whenever and wherever society or the church hold up marriage as the norm, often it is difficult for these individuals to feel normal and whole. Often they do not feel as though they truly belong.

Consider the circumstances of these single adults. In what ways did they contribute to the cause of God? **Elijah** (*1 Kings 17:1–2 Kings 2:11*); **Anna** (*Luke 2:36–38*); **John the Baptist** (*Matt. 11:7–11*); **Philip’s daughters** (*Acts 21:8, 9*). **What other Bible characters remained single?**

The option to live singly. For many people, singleness is a season of life, either preceding or following marriage. For others, singleness is a positive lifetime choice. They recognize that although many people get married, God also gives His sons and daughters the option to live singly. For still others, singleness is not really a choice but an agonizing and reluctant consent to circumstances in which suitable partners are unavailable or marriage would be inappropriate.

Paul supported marriage in his teaching and writing, but he personally held that because of the work to be done for Christ in a short time, singleness was preferable. This was especially true if individuals had the gift for singleness; that is, if they felt led of God to make such a choice. The fellowship of the church must include both single and married people. In the choices they make and challenges they face, single people need to be understood and affirmed as persons rather than minimized, as often happens (even if unintentionally).

Personal value and completeness are ultimately related not to one’s single or married situation but to one’s response in faith to Christ. In Him who draws everyone to Himself, all are complete (*Col. 2:10*).

Who are the single people in your church? How can you relate to them in a positive manner, one that affirms them in their present circumstances?

connections, love for one another, and a sense of community. These values apply both for the family at home and for the church family.

III. Inspired Wisdom About Marriage and Family

“It is only in Christ that a marriage alliance can be safely formed. Human love should draw its closest bonds from divine love. Only where Christ reigns can there be deep, true, unselfish affection.

“Love is a precious gift, which we receive from Jesus. Pure and holy affection is not a feeling, but a principle. Those who are actuated by true love are neither unreasonable nor blind. Taught by the Holy Spirit, they love God supremely, and their neighbor as themselves.

Witnessing

Read Acts 2:41-47. From this passage we learn several things about the believers:

1. They met together daily in the temple (they did not simply dabble in religion).
2. Their hearts were full of rejoicing (self-transcending delight).
3. They ate together with gladness and singleness of heart (no strife, overindulgence, or disorder).
4. They shared not only food but also the practical necessities of life (liberation from materialism and selfishness; preparedness to meet the emergency of ostracism inflicted by relatives, employers, and community).
5. They studied doctrinal truth with sustained interest and unity of belief (the scriptural basis of God’s church, which is the pillar and ground of the truth [1 Tim. 3:15]).

The unhindered openness and freedom of this association implies purity of conduct and motive, without which the whole fellowship would quickly have degenerated into a farce and spectacle of shame. (*Consider 1 Cor. 1:1-12.*)

Christ established His church not merely to serve as a mechanism for promulgating a message; nor did He institute it as a social club for merriment, feasting, and subjective dialogue. He created the church to be His family and awake to its heavenly calling, brimming over with sociable benevolence. It is God’s desire that the church be evangelistically active and cleansed of all worldliness in pursuing its mission to make disciples for His kingdom among the peoples of the world.

Point to ponder: What if the apostles had not been of one accord prior to Pentecost? How would that have affected their preaching, demeanor, and influence?

Household of Households

Discover the family imagery in the following texts describing life in the church: John 20:17; Acts 9:17; Romans 16:1; 1 Corinthians 4:14, 15; Galatians 4:5; 1 Timothy 5:2.

Just as the human family was to reflect the Creator’s relational nature, so the church is to be an even more exquisite replica of the harmonious, giving, loving relationship known within the Godhead. Family terms—*birth, adoption, mother, father, sister, brother*—provide a new vocabulary, a whole new way of talking about the human relationship with God and of human beings with one another.

A template for the church. The Holy Spirit uses common family relationships to describe a community in which new births are embraced, diversity is accommodated, strengths are affirmed, and people are encouraged to grow. If the word *family* calls up warm feelings for us, we likely will embrace this view of the church. Sadly for some, family means painful memories. For these, other images of the church may have more appeal. Yet, God is a relational Being. He formed humanity with relational capacities, and it is comforting to know that although family may fail us, in His church He provides for rest, healing, and experiences of surpassing family love (*compare Ps. 27:10*).

How does the idea of the church as a household (*Gal. 6:10, Eph. 2:19*) open the doors to include everybody?

“Household of faith” calls to mind the sense of belonging that families build in one another and the attitude of neighborliness that has always characterized well-functioning family relationships. Many people, who have received Christ individually as their personal Savior, come as households or families to church. Others attend alone. In a sense, though, their families are with them, for each has been shaped by their family experience, and each will always be part of a family somewhere. Church, then, is quite literally a household of households, a family of families. The first Christians broke bread “from house to house”; yet, they were one church (*Acts 2:46, 47*). First Corinthians 12 shows the importance of valuing, incorporating, nurturing, and utilizing all the individual parts in the complex organism.

How is your experience of family at church similar to or different from your present home or the one in which you grew up? Identify a Christian quality of your current home that could make a difference in life at your church. What one quality of life at church would you like to bring home?

“Though difficulties, perplexities, and discouragements may arise, let neither husband nor wife harbor the thought that their union was a mistake or a disappointment. Determine to be all that it is possible to be to each other. Continue the early attentions. In every way encourage each other in fighting the battles of life. Study to advance the happiness of each other. Let there be mutual love, mutual forbearance. Then marriage, instead of being the end of love, will be as it were the very beginning of love. . . .

“Cultivate that which is noblest in yourselves, and be quick to recognize the good qualities in each other. The consciousness of being appreciated is a wonderful stimulus and satisfaction. Sympathy and respect encourage the striving after excellence, and love itself increases as it stimulates to nobler aims.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 358, 360, 361.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: “A. B. Davidson tells how he was in lodgings in a strange city. He was lonely. He used to walk the streets at evening time. Sometimes through an uncurtained window he would see a family sitting round the table or the fire in happy fellowship; then the curtain would be drawn and he would feel shut out, and lonely in the dark.”—William Barclay, “The Gospel of Matthew,” *The Daily Study Bible*, revised edition (Bangalore, India: Theological Publications in India, 1975), vol. 1, p. 118.

Thought Questions:

1 Years ago, in some Adventist communities that tended to be more sheltered from contact with the world, the word *outsider* could be heard often: “He’s marrying an *outsider*” or “There were four *outsiders* in church today!” Since then, the politically correct church of today is careful not to air such negative comments, but prejudice continues to have a stronghold in more subtle ways. Identify some of them. What measures can your church take to steer away from such prejudices?

2 The church is oftentimes comprised of a mixture of people—culture, ages, and interests. How does one cope with these differences and find ministries and activities that cross these barriers?

Application Question:

The lesson presents the church as the *family* of families. How far can you take this analogy or comparison? Identify some positive qualities of a human family that can be replicated by the church family. What are the negative qualities of the human family that also can be seen in the church family? How should we deal with them?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “The Eden Home a Pattern,” *The Adventist Home*, pp. 25–28; “Who Are My Brethren?” *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 321–327.

Untidy living rooms. “The churches of the Revelation show us that churches are not Victorian parlors where everything is always picked up and ready for guests. They are messy family rooms. Entering a person’s house unexpectedly, we are sometimes met with a barrage of apologies. St. John does not apologize. Things are out of order, to be sure, but that is what happens to churches that are lived in. They are not show rooms. They are living rooms, and if the persons living in them are sinners, there are going to be clothes scattered about, hand-prints on the woodwork, and mud on the carpet. For as long as Jesus insists on calling sinners and not the righteous to repentance—and there is no indication as yet that he has changed his policy in that regard—churches are going to be an embarrassment to the fastidious and an affront to the upright.”—Eugene H. Peterson, *Living the Message* (HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), p. 71.

Discussion Questions:

- ① As a class, discuss how the church should relate to those who are living in a *family* relationship that goes against the Scriptures. How do we show them Christ’s love and acceptance in a way that doesn’t condone their actions?
- ② For singles to gain a sense of wholeness and belonging can be difficult in a culture that holds up marriage as the standard. What can you as a class do to reach out to singles in your own church and show them they are a valued part of the church family?

Summary: “Family” is God’s idea. He formed the human family as an expression of His own relational nature. He has ordained both individual families and the church as a family of families to express His sacrificial love within both these circles of close companionship.