

# 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.*

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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.*

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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?

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**Key Text:** *Isaiah 54:13*

### Teachers Aims:

1. To show how children first learn faith, truth, and values at home.
2. To show how parents must teach by example and make worship a part of daily living.

### Lesson Outline:

#### I. Teaching Faith and Discipleship (*Deut. 6:6, 7*)

- A. Children learn to have faith in God in the home.
- B. The Bible is the standard for teaching faith.
- C. Parents should teach children to be disciples.

#### II. Children First Learn at Home (*Prov. 22:6*)

- A. The family provides the opportunity for children to learn truth and values.
- B. The home is the place in which children learn to develop loving relationships.
- C. Children, in turn, when grown, pass on learned values to their own offspring.

#### III. Parents Lead by Example (*Prov. 1:8*)

- A. Parents help prepare their children for spiritual challenges by sharing their own experiences.
- B. Youthful minds must be guided to choose God's way.

#### IV. Daily Worship (*Ps. 95:6*)

- A. Daily worship in the home is for the purpose of meeting with God and for hearing His Word.
- B. Family prayer strengthens family ties.
- C. Spiritual things must be presented in an attractive manner to the youth.

**Summary:** Parenting is the mutual responsibility of father and mother. Parents must lead by example, helping the youth to develop wholesome values by experiencing daily worship and by learning Bible truths at home.

## COMMENTARY

### I. Introduction

For 40 years Sue and I (Don) have been involved in the educational ministry of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. My 40 years as a residence-hall dean have been punctuated by stories shared from the hearts of adolescents and young adults. Many of these stories have been about the yearning for parental approval. This commentary is about finding a way to receive and send those messages of approval in the form of what the Bible calls a *blessing*.

Even the children of well-meaning parents sometimes are

## 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?

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confused about their place in the family. One day a young man who had learned that his parents were giving him a new car for graduation shared with me what he really wanted—their love and acceptance. The car seemed just one more way to manipulate him. Several hours later these parents arrived on campus. They sat in our living room and told us how much they loved their son. As Sue watched them go to their car to drive home, she realized that if children do not feel loved, it does not matter how much their parents love them.

Children do not need perfect parents; but they do need parents who understand their developmental needs, their temperaments and personalities, their joys and sorrows, and how they best receive love. This requires continual dialog throughout life. Just as a continual dialog with Christ keeps our relationship with Him strong, the same is true with parents and their children.

### II. The Blessing

If you have a legal will, you have spent time thinking about how certain family possessions will be passed on to the next generation. Items passed on are a significant part of the family legacy. However, a legacy is more than money or possessions. A legacy also can be a validation of accomplishment, a recognition of achievement, and an affirmation of acceptance. It can be a statement of hope and trust in the future of the family and a confirmation of family values. If your child asked you to explain the meaning of your family, how would you answer?

In biblical times the family legacy was passed on through the *blessing* given to the eldest son. God blessed Abraham (*Gen. 12:2, 3*) and Isaac (*Gen. 25:11*). In turn, Isaac blessed Jacob (*Gen. 27:26-29*). The tradition of passing on the *blessing* became a strong thread in the fabric of Hebrew culture.

What can we learn from these examples of personal affirmations that we can apply to current realities? According to Gary Smalley and Dr. John Trent, the fundamental ingredients of a *blessing* are:

- Meaningful touch
- A spoken message
- Attaching *high value* to the one being blessed
- Picturing a special future for the one being blessed
- An active commitment to fulfill the blessing

(Gary Smalley and John Trent, *The Blessing* [New York: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1986], p. 24.)

Now let us consider some of these ingredients.

### III. Meaningful Touch

Did you witness your parents embracing, kissing, or holding hands? Were you hugged enough and kissed enough as a child? Is appropriate physical touch a means of loving communication in your current family?

## 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?**

Meaningful touch is an important part of the blessing. Descriptions of physical touch often accompany the stories in Scripture of passed-on blessings.

#### IV. A Spoken Message

“A blessing becomes so only when it is spoken.”—Smalley and Trent, p. 25. “There are many who regard the expression of love as a weakness, and they maintain a reserve that repels others. . . . We should beware of this error. Love cannot long exist without

## Inductive Bible Study

**Texts for Discovery:** *Deuteronomy 6:4-9, Proverbs 3:5-12, Ephesians 6:1-4*

- 1 Training our children to become Christ’s disciples assumes that we have accepted Christ’s discipline in our own lives. Make a list of seven essential characteristics parents should be able to pass on to their children by word and action. For each characteristic, mention at least one strategy to accomplish that transmission.
- 2 Deuteronomy 6:4-9 is God’s mandate to communicate spiritual truths to the next generation. Notice the progression: “when you sit . . . when you walk . . . when you lie down . . . when you rise up.” Today, when family members often head off in different directions, what specific methods can parents use to carve out quality time to transmit values to their children?
- 3 Morning and evening worship is one way families can bond with one another in a typical work/school day. What methods have you developed that meet the needs of your family? What have you tried that didn’t work? What devotional activities appeal to your family the most?
- 4 The parable of the lost sons (*Luke 15:11-32*) reminds us that the child who stays home to work can sometimes be just as lost as the child who travels to a distant country. How do you know that your children understand grace, as well as discipleship? How have you tried to communicate grace?
- 5 The other side of the commandment “Honor your father and your mother” (*Exod. 20:12*) is Paul’s admonition: “Fathers, do not provoke your children” (*Eph. 6:4*). We have to earn our children’s respect. The older they get, the more difficult that becomes. What’s the one thing you want your adult children never to forget? What’s the best way to communicate that?

## Winsome Witness to Your Child

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

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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.***

expression. Let not the heart of one connected with you starve for the want of kindness and sympathy.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 107.

### **V. Attaching High Value to the One Being Blessed**

Consider the blessing Isaac gave Jacob in Genesis 27:26-29. If you were affirming a son or daughter what would you say to tell that child how much you value him or her? Be specific. Avoid flattery and words like *always* and *never*. For example, “I cherish you and the kindness you showed that little child just now” is better than “You always do so well with children.”

## **Witnessing**

Discipling comes about through the intimate contact of mind with mind and the daily example that teachers and parents set before those they wish to instruct. Children note everything that adults do. They observe our facial expressions, tones of voice, style and tempo of movement, as well as the things we say and the priorities that engage our attention. We are all living epistles, but the question to be settled is What content may be read in the scroll of our lives?

Mary Jane grew up in a home where worships were exploited as a platform for her father to assert his authority as the head of the house. He lengthily catechized Mary Jane and her siblings to cease being rebellious and always to obey their father. He assured them that they were all on the path to perdition, because they did not adequately conform to his requirements. Mary Jane and her brothers and sisters actually did strive to do what was right, but their performance always fell short of their father’s burdensome expectations and inquisitorial probes. As a teenager Mary Jane determined that when she became a parent, she would not turn family worship into a judicial inquest. It took her many years to discover how much God loves His children and seeks to impart His joy to them and how different His discipline is from the censure and condemnation that was wrapped about her childhood like a shroud.

*Objective:* Draw up fresh plans for making family worship pleasant, lively, brief, substantive, and uplifting. How can children be included in the selection of various parts of family worship? How can we make family worship an experience of coming into God’s banqueting house where His banner over us is love, instead of a dreary trek to a spiritual wasteland?

## 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?**

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## Life-Application Approach

**Icebreaker:** Nineteenth-century Scottish preacher Horatius Bonar asked 253 Christian friends how old they were when they were converted. Here's what he discovered:

- Under 20 years of age—138
- Between 20 and 30—85
- Between 30 and 40—22
- Between 40 and 50—4
- Between 50 and 60—3
- Between 60 and 70—1
- Over 70—0

(*Daily Bread* [[http://www.christianglobe.com/Illustrations/the Details.asp?whichOne=c&whichFile=children](http://www.christianglobe.com/Illustrations/the%20Details.asp?whichOne=c&whichFile=children)]).

### Thought Question:

A 35-year-old, third-generation, Seventh-day Adventist single man unburdened his heart to a female friend one day. He said, "I'm an Adventist only by habit. I believe in God. I read my Bible and pray every day. Yet, I don't know who Jesus really is. Where do I find that intimate relationship you have with Jesus?" While his friend searched for words of consolation, she thought of her mother, her grandfather, and her junior Sabbath School teacher, who showed her the real Jesus. She realized how fortunate she was to have met Jesus when she was younger. Discuss why your church loses church members. Identify discipleship programs and methods for the under-twenty-age-group members of your church.

### Application Question:

"Merrill Lynch now offers a 'financial parenting' service to the children of its wealthiest clients (those with at least \$100 million in net assets). The financial powerhouse contracts with psychologists to help children cope with such 'affluenza' symptoms as 'sloth and selfishness and a general disconnect from the average Joe.' The service also helps educate its young clients about the responsibilities of wealth, including the importance of charity." —*U.S. News & World Report*, "Poor Little Rich Kids," *Discipleship Journal*, vol. 118 (July/August 2000), p. 14. The trend in today's busy society is to find someone else to do parental jobs. While one person cannot single-handedly change this trend, each of us can seek to meet the needs of parents in the community. Challenge your class to research the needs of families in your area. How can your church meet at least one of these needs?

**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.