

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.

Key Text: *John 1:12*

Teachers Aims:

1. To explain how cultural differences can influence Christian standards.
2. To discuss the importance of family and of community around the world.
3. To show how values and beliefs develop from personal experience.

Lesson Outline:

I. Christian Beliefs Transcend Cultural Differences (*1 Cor. 12:13*)

- A. Christian standards are challenged by different cultural practices around the world.
- B. Christians are to show no partiality when sharing the gospel with people of different nationalities.
- C. Christian beliefs should not be compromised to accommodate different cultural practices.

II. Family and Community (*Josh. 24:14, 15*)

- A. The importance of family and of community can be found in many parts of the world.
- B. Christian principles for family living are universal.
- C. Families must adjust to change while maintaining an appreciation for spiritual things.

III. Developing Personal Values (*Isa. 54:13, Jeremiah 31, 33, 34*)

- A. Christian standards are passed down from one generation to the next.
- B. Each individual must develop faith and personal values from his or her own experience.

Summary: The biblical principles for Christian living are universal. As Bible truths are shared around the world and passed down to each generation, Christian standards should not be compromised. However, each individual must learn to value these principles through his or her own personal experiences with the Lord.

COMMENTARY

I. Introduction

Families of Faith seek the *way* leading to emotional and spiritual wellness. They avoid the *way* leading to tragic consequences (*Matt. 7:13*). Ask your class to discuss how following God's *way* has given meaning to their families and personal lives.

II. When a Family of Faith Has a Wayward Child

Some in your class may have children who have left the church. If the subject arises, respond with concern, kindness, and empathy.

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?

Everyone has his or her unique story. Avoid clichés—solutions or assigning blame.

Consider Jeremiah 6:16, 17 from *The Living Bible*: “Yet the Lord pleads with you still: Ask where the good road is, the godly paths you used to walk in, in the days of long ago. Travel there, and you will find rest for your souls. But you reply, ‘No, that is not the road we want!’ I set watchmen over you who warned you: ‘Listen for the sound of the trumpet! It will let you know when trouble comes.’ But you said, ‘No! We won’t pay any attention.’” God created us with the power of choice. He will not force His way on anyone. Neither must parents force their ways on their children.

Even though God will not force anyone to follow Him, He is eager to seek lost souls. If we believe that God desires the very best for our children, then let us trust Him to do His work.

Faithful families live in a world that is constantly buffeted by sin. The devil is determined to destroy families in the following areas:

A. Popular culture. Television, movies, and other diversions generally distort God’s ideal for marriage and families. Discuss some of these distortions in class.

B. Where do I belong? Seventh-day Adventist college students were asked to develop a list of what they perceived to be the problems they experience with the church. Then they were to prioritize their list. Their number one concern was that they believed the church neither needed nor wanted them. In many different ways they had been told to be quiet, to stay out of sight, that someday they would be the church, but not now. What are the results of this perception? How can the perception be changed?

C. Seasons of change come to every family. Does any Christian groom or bride really understand what his or her vows entail? Chronic illness, loss of a job, death of a child, false accusations against a spouse—if we could actually peer into the future, some weddings might not occur.

D. Faithful youth. Wednesday’s study may create negative remarks concerning Adventist young people. However, having worked with the church’s youth for many years, we (Sue and Don) are encouraged by the life of faith so many young Adventists are experiencing. For example: A young man, who worked for me (Don) for three years, ends every prayer with “We love You Lord, and we can’t wait for You to come back and take us home.” How many people do you know who express that same confidence in Jesus’ return?

E. Lessons to be learned. Ever since I (Don) first began hiring young men to be resident assistants in one of the dormitories on campus, I asked one question of each applicant: “What positive lessons or values, that are a vital part of who you are, did you learn from your parents?” The answers have been instructive, and they have not changed much over the years. The answers include: “God loves me!” “I can pray about everything.” “Truth will always rise to

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.

the surface eventually.” “Sacrifice is its own reward.” “I can determine how I act and feel.” “Life may be unfair, but that doesn’t give me permission to be unfair.” “Character is who you really are, and it will make the journey to heaven with you.” “Regardless of the consequences, tell the truth.” I could continue, but I believe these examples make the point that youth can learn great things from their parents. Furthermore, what wise young people appreciate is that their parents taught these lessons not only through their words but through their deeds in ways that helped them to meet Jesus.

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *Joshua 2:7-13, Acts 10:1-28, 15:5-11*

- 1 The story of Jacob and Laban (*Gen. 29:14-30*) reveals something about marriages in that culture. Skim through the story and focus on both the similarities and the differences in the ways marriages are arranged in your society. What are the advantages, if any, to our marriage customs now as opposed to the ones observed back then? What drawbacks are part of each system?
- 2 What cultures, other than your own, do you have a working familiarity with? What are the things about that culture you admire when it comes to family relationships? Finally, what are the overriding biblical principles of family life that transcend the culture of every age? List at least five.
- 3 Some families melt under the pressure of traumatic changes, such as death, chronic illness, accident, loss of a job, relocation, and other disruptions in life. Other families, while just as traumatized, rally together to support one another as they work through the problems. What makes the difference? What Bible promises can all families claim to make survival more likely?
- 4 How did you or your family come to join the church? Tell the story in a few sentences. Have you ever wished your story was more exciting? Do your children or grandchildren appreciate the faith and courage it took for you to make your commitment to Christ and the church? What Bible text comes closest to reflecting your personal statement of belief?
- 5 Often the mere mention of a loved one’s name brings pleasant memories—Grandma’s enchiladas, Grandpa’s garden, Cousin Cindy’s love of dogs. What do people think about when they think of you? What do you wish they thought?

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?

It is hard to put a cap on the enthusiasm that comes from meeting Jesus for the first time. Fred was angry and disillusioned the first time I met him. He came to the academy already having been expelled from two others—and it was only October. In the space of a year his mother had been baptized, his father had been killed in Vietnam, and his mother had remarried an older man who was very unlike Fred’s hero-father.

Fred also smoked, so we arranged for a smoking-cessation program. In five days, Fred increased his habit from one pack a day to two packs a day. Eventually, his habits and attitudes became so destructive that we asked him to withdraw from our school.

Almost nine months later, however, he reappeared. He had been

Witnessing

As a witness for God, Abraham makes a fascinating case study and a model for all ages. Called from a culture immersed in idolatry (*Genesis 12*), Abram (whom God later renamed Abraham to denote his being the progenitor of the faithful in all ages) kept his spiritual discernment clear by adhering to God’s commandments and specified mode of worship (*Gen. 26:5*). Abraham’s fidelity to God was the fruit, and not the root, of his faith (*Gen. 15:6; Neh. 9:7, 8*). Thus, he is an exemplar of new-covenant faith from patriarchal times.

God called Abraham to nomadic living in order that he might circulate as light and salt to a dark and spiritually vitiated world. In many respects Abraham’s mode of life resembled that of surrounding peoples—he dwelt in tents, engaged in animal husbandry, ate simple foods, and wore the modest clothing of that era; but he never stooped to incorporating idolatrous practices in his life. Abraham stood noticeably above the ways of the world by his peaceableness (*Gen. 13:5-13*), high integrity, noble courage, unselfish conduct (*Genesis 14*), and purity of worship for the glory of God (*Gen. 15:5-12; 17:1, 2*). Abraham taught and spiritually guided his entire household (*Gen. 18:19*). His own reverence for God was a convincing example to them.

Further, he was a missionary to unbelievers. “Wherever he pitched his tent, he set up beside it the altar for sacrifice and worship. When the tent was removed, the altar remained; and many a roving Canaanite, whose knowledge of God had been gained from the life of Abraham His servant, tarried at that altar to offer sacrifice to Jehovah.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 187.

Consider this: How would it have affected Abraham’s reputation if he had accepted the king of Sodom’s offered reward for rescuing the captives from that city? Might he not have been regarded henceforth as a mercenary rather than as a liberator?

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* that we have been called to share?

living in a *hippie commune*. There, a *Jesus Freak* shared the gospel with him. Now Fred was returning home to tell his mother about Jesus. He was not certain if she really had a solid relationship with Him. On his way, he stopped to visit me. He was concerned to know if I truly understood the gospel.

I have no fear about where the church is currently being led. God is at the helm; and He will use every means to confront us with His grace. That bodes well for His imperfect church and His imperfect children. The gospel message, combined with the power of the Holy Spirit, can break down even the most stubborn resistance.

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: “It was faith which kept up John Knox when he was in despair. Once when he was a slave on the galleys, the ship came in sight of St. Andrews. He was so weak that he had to be lifted up bodily in order to see. They showed him the church steeple and asked if he knew it. ‘Yes,’ he said, ‘I know it well: and I am fully persuaded, how weak that ever I now appear, that I shall not depart this life till that my tongue shall glorify his godly name in the same place.’—Barclay, “The Letters to Timothy, Titus and Philemon,” *The Daily Study Bible*, revised edition, p. 52.

Thought Questions:

- ❶ Knox’s passion to worship and praise God was proportionate to the amount of faith he had. What are the characteristics of families who, generation after generation, retain their level of commitment to the church and their passion for the Lord? What do they do differently?
- ❷ What are the elements that comprise the line between a habitual spiritual life and an active, fruitful one? What role does the church play in determining on which side the members stand?

Application Question:

The family unit is the birth place of many things that can be either negative or positive: creativity, attitude, perception of truth, priorities, and faith. Success depends on how much we allow the urgent to get in the way of the important. Parents often realize too late that time has slipped away. Think of creative ways to manage time within a family. Compile these ideas and share them with your congregation.

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.