

# 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?**

**Key Text:** *Joshua 24:15*

### Teachers Aims:

1. To acknowledge that all that we are and all that we possess come from God.
2. To discuss our responsibility to share the gospel at home first.
3. To show how hospitality can be a tool for witnessing.

### Lesson Outline:

#### I. Giving God the Praise (*Ps. 34:1, 2*)

- A. God's people must not be self-sufficient and complacent.
- B. Material things are blessings from God to be used for His glory and praise.

#### II. Sharing the Gospel at Home (*Deut. 6:5-9*)

- A. As God's witnesses we must first share the gospel with those in our own household.
- B. Special attention should be given to the spiritual growth of the children and of the youth.
- C. Young people can learn spiritual things even from imperfect parents.

#### III. Sharing the Home With Others (*Matt. 25:35, 45; Titus 2:7*)

- A. Hospitality is a way of expressing self-giving love.
- B. Social gatherings in the home are opportunities for witnessing to other individuals and families.

**Summary:** The first mission field is the home. Christians must share the gospel with family members. Hospitality in the home also can be an avenue for witnessing to visitors. When in view of others, God's people must be careful to acknowledge Him as the Source of all their possessions and of all their accomplishments.

## COMMENTARY

### I. Introduction

Hezekiah received a wonderful opportunity to talk with visitors about the God who had healed him. Instead, he conducted a tour that showcased his wealth and military force. In commenting about these visitors, the prophet Isaiah asked Hezekiah, "What have they seen in your palace?" (*Isa. 39:4, NIV*).

This is a question we need to ask ourselves. We may not have visitors from Babylon, but how we use the gift of hospitality may have eternal consequences. "If we will open hearts and homes to the divine principles of life we shall become channels for currents of life-giving power. From our homes will flow streams of healing, bringing life and beauty and fruitfulness where now are barrenness and dearth."—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 355.

Isaiah's question is about priorities. What do our homes say about our commitments, faith, hope, and love? Remember, the

## 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 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.**

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Christianity practiced in our homes also is seen in the workplace, at school, on the playing fields, everywhere we interact with others. Remember, also, that home is where we are most known and where the credibility of our work and of our deeds is most challenged.

## II. The Ministry of the Home

Have you thought of your home as being a ministry? How about your marriage? Does your family have a written mission statement that incorporates a definition of ministry? Does it include who you are, your priorities, and how you will accomplish your goals?

“The mission of the home extends beyond its own members. The Christian home is to be an object lesson, illustrating the excellence of the true principles of life. Such an illustration will be a power for good in the world. Far more powerful than any sermon that can be preached is the influence of a true home upon human hearts and lives.”—Ellen G. White, p. 352.

“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.”—Page 358.

One of the ministries of many Christian homes is hospitality. What is the difference between entertaining and hospitality? Entertaining is about making an impression. What Hezekiah did for his guests from Babylon was entertainment.

Hospitality, however, emphasizes relationships. Guests are made to feel comfortable, welcomed, and included.

A home where we (Don and Sue) have been guests many times over the last 30 years defines hospitality. We always feel welcomed and at home. The food is wholesome and plentiful. Conversation flows, because the hosts ask open-ended questions that encourage interaction. They often have given up their own beds to accommodate guests.

Now consider the following stories:

*Story One.* A family lived at the edge of town, with only dirt roads extending beyond. This was desert country with jackrabbits, tumbleweeds, sagebrush, and rattlesnakes. During the summer it was usually unbearably hot.

One such day an older woman knocked at this family’s door. While walking to town, she had been overwhelmed by the heat. She needed a glass of water and an opportunity to rest.

However, a level of heat prostration had apparently set in, for the water she swallowed came right back up. So, the woman of the house laid the overheated visitor on the sofa and placed a cool cloth on her forehead.

The visitor proceeded with her trip when the typical desert cool-down of approaching nightfall made walking bearable. That was

## 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?**

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hospitality!

*Story Two.* The night before his first day of classes, a college freshman received a call from a teenager whom he had met at work. She described a shouting match with her stepfather, followed by his declaration that she was no longer welcome in his home. In desperation she called the most stable person she knew. So, after checking with his father, this student drove to where she had been when she called. Sometime later he came home, but instead of one troubled teen, there were three, all dressed in black, with spiked multicolored hair and pierced navels.

## Inductive Bible Study

**Texts for Discovery:** *Isaiah 38:1-6, 39:1-4, John 1:40-42, 1 Corinthians 7:12-15, 1 Peter 2:9*

- 1 Read 1 Peter 2:9. First, list the three metaphors that Peter used to describe the influence of Christians in first-century society. Then repackage each metaphor into a phrase or expression recognizable to modern audiences. What is the primary purpose of our Christian witness? How can our families help facilitate it?
- 2 List three of your most precious possessions (they need not have any value beyond what you place on them). What do these three items say about your values? How can these three things help you testify about God's activity in your life?
- 3 Imagine someone in your family or extended family who seems unusually resistant to the gospel. As far as you can understand that person, what seems to be the primary obstacle to his or her acceptance of the gospel? What ways have you tried to overcome it? With the help of the others in your class, outline three creative strategies to break down this person's prejudice and to allow him or her to hear, really hear, the gospel.
- 4 Contrary to popular belief, married couples do not have to be alike in every respect. There may be differences in likes and dislikes; there may even be differences in faith and commitment. What is more important than having a spouse "made in our own image"? What is implied in Paul's counsel: "God has called us to live in peace" (*1 Cor. 7:15, NIV*)?
- 5 In Bible times hospitality was often a matter of life and death. Travelers were at the mercy of those who had food and water. How are modern *travelers* starving for hospitality? List three ways Christian families can meet their needs.

## 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?**

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When they arrived at the freshman's house, his mother made the teens chocolate-chip cookies, sandwiches, a salad, and a fruit drink. That night the girl slept in the guest bedroom, while the two boys slept on couches in the living room. Both parents had early morning appointments, so the son stayed home, missing his first college class to prepare breakfast for his guests. Then, after they expressed a desire to reconcile with their parents, he drove them to their homes. That was hospitality!

*Story Three.* Monday through Friday, Dave took the subway to work. Each of those days, he was confronted with homeless people begging for food, money, or a job. Over the course of time, he became acquainted with one of these people named Joe. One day he asked Joe what he really needed. "A hug!" Joe answered, as he opened his arms wide. Dave stepped into Joe's embrace. Later Dave said he felt as if it were the embrace of God. That was hospitality!

This week's study provides an opportunity to discuss practical Christianity. Matthew 25:34-40 helps us realize that it matters how we respond to the human needs around us. When we respond with compelling, selfless acts of service, we are actually serving Jesus Himself.

## Witnessing

What factors do you believe are the most vital in forming a hospitable environment that properly represents God? In your estimation, is hospitality a minor or a major talent in service for God? Explain your view.

Are you afraid to have anyone over to your house to eat because you fear that your home is too messy, your cooking skills too limited, your space too small, your finances too tight? What can you do to remedy or compensate for these drawbacks? Does having a small domicile prevent one from extending hospitality to one or two guests at a time? Does poverty prevent one from offering a simple meal lovingly served? Might there not be people in our reach more hungry for friendship and sympathy than for food?

"Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels" (*Heb. 13:2; consider also Isa. 58:6, 7; Rom. 12:12; 16:1, 2; 1 Pet. 4:9, 10; 3 John 5-8.*) Our Savior declares, "Inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me" (*Matt. 25:40, NKJV*).

## 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*)

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

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**Zacchaeus** (*Luke 19:1-9*)

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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?**

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## Life-Application Approach

**Icebreaker:** “It is told of J. P. Mahaffy . . . that when he was asked if he was a Christian, his answer was: ‘Yes, but not offensively so.’ He meant that he did not allow his Christianity to interfere with the society he kept and the pleasure he loved. Sometimes we say to other people, practically in so many words, that we are Church members, but not to worry about it too much; that we have no intention of being different; that we are prepared to take our full share in all the pleasures of the world; and that we do not expect people to take any special trouble to respect any vague principles that we may have.

“The Christian can never escape the duty of being different from the world. It is not our duty to be conformed to the world; it is our duty to be transformed from it.”—Barclay, “The Gospel of Matthew,” *The Daily Study Bible*, revised edition, vol. 1, p. 391.

### Thought Questions:

**1** “The church may at times disappoint us, and God’s servants on earth may disappoint us. But when we battle our way face to face with Jesus Christ, he never disappoints us.”—Barclay, “The Gospel of Mark,” *The Daily Study Bible*, revised edition, p. 218. This quarter we have been learning about how important both the church and the human families are in the role of witnessing to the world. Yet, it is important to remember that both families are made up of human beings. We have a natural propensity to make bad judgments and mistakes. How can we pursue our call to share Jesus without feeling handicapped by our humanness?

**2** Who are you when no one is looking, and what does this say about your faith? Is it necessary for us and our families to be the same inside and out? How far should one take this? Is it even feasible to be the same at all times, under all circumstances? Explain.

**3** What is the practical implication of being a called-out people (*1 Pet. 2:9*)? Oftentimes we take being unique to the extreme and are the *standing-out-and-being-oddly-different* people! Are there disadvantages to being so different that people are cautious of us? Explain.

### Application Question:

Make a list of the top priorities of your church. Then read 1 Peter 4:7-11. Compare the passage to your list. How well is your church doing? Read Acts 2:44, 46 and 4:32. What are the areas that need to be revamped? What else should you be doing?

**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.