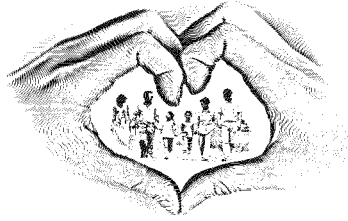


Turning Hearts *in the* End Time



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Kings 16:29–17:24; Mal. 4:5, 6; Matt. 3:2; 11:14, 15; 17:10; 18:20-45.*

Memory Text: “I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse” (*Malachi 4:5, 6, NIV*).

The Week at a Glance: In the closing verses of the Old Testament, a heart-turning work by Elijah is predicted before the day of the Lord.

A boy ran away from home. After years of no word from him, the parents got a postcard. He was coming their way and wanted to see them. “I’ll be riding the train that runs behind our house,” he wrote. “If it’s OK for me to stop and see you, hang a white handkerchief on the fence, and I’ll get off at the next station. If it’s not there, I’ll just keep riding.”

As the train hurtled toward his boyhood home, he wondered, *Will the handkerchief be there?* Finally, the fence came into view, covered with handkerchiefs, towels, bedsheets, and pillowcases, not only on the fence but on the shrubbery and the trees—a great mass of white, saying WELCOME HOME!

The point should be obvious.

**Study this week’s lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 25.*

The Prophecy of Turned Hearts

Compare the prediction of the coming of Elijah with New Testament references to this event. *Mal. 4:5, 6; Matt. 11:14, 15; 17:10; Mark 6:15; Luke 1:17.*

In the days of Malachi, God’s appeal to the nation, “ ‘Return to Me, and I will return to you,’ ” met with the arrogant response, “ ‘In what way shall we return?’ ” (*Mal. 3:7, NKJV*). The frustrated prophet announced that one further opportunity for revival would be given. Recalling the heart-turning reform begun by Elijah (*1 Kings 18:37*), Malachi predicted his coming again to “ ‘turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers’ ” (*Mal. 4:6, NIV*).

A Jewish tradition developed that Elijah would appear personally as the herald of the Messiah (*compare Matt. 17:10, Mark 6:15*). However, the New Testament presents John the Baptist as a fulfillment of the prophecy (*Matt. 11:14, 15; Luke 1:17*).

What do you think the phrase “turn the hearts” means?

Several applications are possible for these texts: *It refers to the reconciliation of the people of Israel with the Lord.* God as Father (*Isa. 63:16*) has turned from His wrath toward His children (*Mic. 7:18, 19*) and calls them to return to Him (*Isa. 44:22, Mal. 3:7*). *It refers to the reconnecting of later generations with their faithful ancestors through covenant renewal.* The prophetic call for God’s people to follow the faith of the patriarchs was given repeatedly in the Old Testament. Whether the land continued as a blessed dwelling place was directly related to covenant faithfulness (*Deut. 4:29-31*). *It refers to the restoration and renewal of family relationships.* Parent-child relationships are a practical expression of covenant faithfulness with God. Here, too, fulfillment of responsibilities to parents and children interweave with continued inheritance of the land and God’s blessing (*Prov. 2:21*).

What is the connection between a restored relationship with God and restored relationships in our families? Why must one precede the other?

Key Texts: *Deuteronomy 30:2, Ephesians 4:32*

Teachers Aims:

1. To learn how broken family relationships can be restored through Christ.
2. To explain how repentance can lead to restored relationships.
3. To show that Christian families can be examples of restoration and of healing.

Lesson Outline:

I. Reconnecting With God and With Family (*Mark 11:25*)

- A. Broken family relationships can be restored through a reconnection with God.
- B. The physical healing of loved ones strengthens family ties and faith in God.
- C. Family worship is an avenue for loved ones to be renewed in Christ and to be reunited with one another.

II. Restoration Through Repentance (*Ps. 51:10-12, Isa. 55:7*)

- A. Repentance comes as a result of God's urging us to examine our hearts and of His filling us with a genuine desire to change.
- B. True repentance can lead to restored relationships.
- C. Understanding the meaning of the Cross encourages true repentance.

III. A Model to the World (*Luke 24:47, 48*)

- A. Christian families can show unselfish love and forgiveness in restoring family relationships.
- B. Christian families can serve as models of true repentance and devotion to God.

Summary: Broken family ties can be restored through a renewed commitment to God. Christ-centered individuals demonstrate unselfish love and forgiveness in their relationships to one another.

COMMENTARY

I. Introduction

Malachi 4:5, 6 set the stage for this week's lesson. Known as the *Elijah message*, these verses have provided a launching pad for countless seminars, sermons, books, articles, and counseling sessions done in the name of "Family Life Ministries." In fact, this quarter's Bible study guide is a response to these verses.

II. The Elijah Message

Elijah is perhaps best remembered for walking into Ahab's palace to tell the king it was not going to rain for three years. Then three years later he set up a burnt-offering-altar duel in the foothills of Mount Carmel. Baal versus God! Elijah versus 450 prophets of Baal! Elijah's short but powerful speech precedes one of the great moments of Scripture. "How long are you going to waver between

Family Reunion

The introduction of Baal worship into Israel by Jezebel, the Sidonian wife of King Ahab, hastened the nation's downward moral slide. The teachings of God that uplifted marriage, family, and sexuality were overshadowed by practices such as incest, prostitution, and other sexual perversions. Into this arena of conflict over worship stepped Elijah, whose very name, "Jehovah-is-my-God," rebuked a belief in Baal.

What experience of Elijah associated him with overturning heathen beliefs and bringing new life to families? *1 Kings 16:29–17:24; compare Luke 4:25, 26.*

Elijah was a marked man after announcing the curse of drought upon the land. God sheltered him in an unlikely place—at a poor widow's dwelling in Zarephath of Sidon, near Jezebel's hometown. Elijah greeted the widow with a grim test, to use her last bits of kindling, oil, and flour to feed him and to trust God for her future. Her faith became legendary. Jesus Himself would later commend her (*Luke 4:26*). As her oil and meal stretched out over many days, the woman came to understand more about Jehovah. Then, tragically, her only son fell sick and died. In expressing her grief to Elijah, she reflected the familiar religion around her, the perverted beliefs that now engulfed Israel, in which one's sin could require child sacrifice (*1 Kings 17:18; compare Jer. 19:5, Mic. 6:7*).

What effect did the reunion with her son have upon the Phoenician widow's spiritual experience? *1 Kings 17:24*. **What can we learn from her comments?**

The mother's response reveals the effect of the Elijah message. Faith in God and His Word arises in the heart as, by His power, life is restored and the family is reunited. Many today may give assent as doctrines are preached but are lukewarm in their spiritual experience. However, when the truths of God's Word are experienced personally and revival and restoration occur in home relationships, conviction comes ever so much more powerfully upon the heart.

What are some family reunions that you are still waiting for? What promises of God are you clinging to that give you hope of that reunion?

two opinions? . . . If the Lord is God, follow him! But if Baal is God, then follow him!’ ” (*1 Kings 18:21, TLB*).

However, what does Elijah have to do with end-time families? Just before Jesus’ second coming, Malachi predicts a message and a movement that will reconcile and restore families (*Mal. 4:5, 6*). Malachi’s allusion to Elijah’s bold acts teaches us how we should respond to end-time conflicts.

This reminds us of one of our former students who went to Vietnam as a medic in the 1960s. Under heavy enemy fire he saved many lives while risking his own, and he returned home a decorated hero. When we met, I asked him how he had managed to be so brave. “Courage is not about being brave,” he responded. “It’s about just doing your duty.” Elijah’s confrontation with Ahab and the prophets of Baal was not so much about being brave. It was about doing his duty as God had given it to him. It was an act of faith.

Perhaps, at its core, the Elijah message is a call for us to do our duty in confronting the ruined relationships and dysfunctional family relationships in our churches and communities. Then those who are lovingly confronted perhaps will be more receptive to the Holy Spirit’s work, a work that calls them to duty while they wait for the Lord’s return. The purpose of Family Life Ministries is to prepare people to meet Jesus.

Perhaps the threatened “curse” of Malachi 4:6 is a reference to how bitterness and unforgiveness keep families from growing in Christ, thus distracting them from the Second Coming. Perhaps this “curse” is evident in the rising divorce rates and increasing reports of domestic violence, infidelity, and child abuse. If this is true, then bitterness and unforgiveness among colleagues, church members, friends, and even enemies also could be preventing us from growing in Christ and causing us to forget about Christ’s return.

Some years ago, Ken and Judy made a commitment that their family would be a priority and that they would use their marriage as a form of ministry. One day they heard that two friends from college days, living several states away, had filed for divorce. Ken and Judy made contact with these friends, agreed to meet at a neutral site, and spent three days talking, praying, listening, caring, and sharing with them. The marriage was saved, because old friends cared enough to confront and to help pick up the pieces. That is what heart turning is all about.

A young man was picked up in a drug-sweep not too far from the academy from which he had graduated the year before. During the sweep he refused to give his name and reacted angrily to the efforts of the police, who called me (Don) to see if I could identify him.

Many years later I received a letter from this young man. He shared a few details of what happened afterward. For the next fifteen years, he had remained on a drug-induced high. Then one day the drugs ran out. He went to a local community college where he had

Turning Hearts at the Altar

Read 1 Kings 18:20-45. Write out what essentially this whole episode is about. Though the context is totally different, how can the principles seen in this story apply to family life?

On Mount Carmel, Elijah longed for covenant renewal on the part of his nation, a turning back to the faith of their fathers that would bring healing to their lives, their homes, and their land.

The hour of the evening sacrifice. After the heathen priests' failure with their sacrifice, Elijah took his turn. He was deliberate. The time of day drew attention to God's redemptive plan revealed in the sanctuary service (*compare* *Exod. 29:41*). The invitation " 'Come near to me' " (*1 Kings 18:30, NKJV*) reminds us of the Savior's welcoming sinners (*compare* *Matt. 11:28*). Parents who are pained at the waywardness of a child can be assured God loves him or her as truly as He loved the Israelites. God works unceasingly to draw wayward ones to Him.

Elijah's focus on Jehovah's altar finds its equivalent in our time when Jesus and His saving grace are uplifted in families. Family worship is an opportunity to talk to Him in prayer, to speak of Him to one another, to receive anew His free gift of salvation, and to give our hearts time to reflect on His teachings.

The response Elijah requested would signal that God had taken them back to Himself. First Kings 18:37 says, " 'That this people may know . . . You have turned their hearts back to You again' " (*NKJV*). We cannot turn our hearts to God; we can only respond to His grace, and that He freely gives.

The all-consuming fire fell, not upon the guilty but upon the sacrifice, pointing forward to Jesus, who was made "sin for us, that we might become the righteousness of God in Him" (*2 Cor. 5:21, NKJV*). Confession and praise burst from the people's lips. Because they did not respond to God's call, the false priests were executed. Then refreshing rains ended the curse upon the land.

In what condition is your home *altar*? What specific ways can you *rebuild* the altar in your home, if indeed it needs some rebuilding?

purchased them before, but that day he could not find a pusher.

Angry and feeling the growing need for that high, Jim leaned against a cement wall for support. Suddenly, into his mind flashed a picture of his mother praying for him. Incensed, he shook his fist at God saying, “If You were any kind of God at all, You never would have allowed me to hurt my mother like I have.” In God’s sight, this apparently was a prayer, for as Jim relates the story, “Suddenly, the *squarest* looking *square* I had ever seen was standing before me inviting me to attend what turned out to be a Bible study. One

Inductive Bible Study

Texts for Discovery: *1 Kings 17:8-24; Isaiah 58:6-12; Malachi 4:5, 6; John 1:23-27*

- 1 To social institutions crumbling under the pressures of moral decay, the last words of the Old Testament offer a promise to be claimed by all: reconciliation between parents and children. Give three modern examples of the pressures being faced by today’s families. Give three biblical prescriptions to counteract these threats.
- 2 Elijah had a ministry to the Gentile woman of Zarephath as well as to God’s chosen people, the Israelites. What was the primary issue in Elijah’s ministry to the woman of Zarephath? What emerged as the primary issue in Elijah’s ministry on Mount Carmel? (*Read Rev. 14:6, 7, 12.*) How are trust and worship important in God’s last message to the world? How do they bridge the gap between believer and nonbeliever?
- 3 John the Baptist described the effect of his ministry with these words: “He [Jesus] must become greater; I must become less” (*John 3:30, NIV*). How do these words describe the attitude that God’s people must adopt? How would our families be affected if we adopted them as our own personal motto? List at least three.
- 4 God’s ideal for the family is that it be a place of love, nurture, training, correction, and refuge. The same also can be said for the church. Share briefly an experience when your church fellowship became kind of a surrogate family.
- 5 Not everyone enjoys the love and support of a nuclear family. But everyone, no matter his or her social, economic, or educational levels, can be adopted into God’s family. What does your local congregation do to celebrate and affirm everyone’s connection to the family of God? What more could it do?

Turning Hearts at the Jordan

Alongside Gabriel's prediction (*Luke 1:17*) and Jesus' confirmation of John the Baptist as the predicted Elijah (*Matt. 11:14; 17:12, 13*), the Gospel writers affirm that he was the "messenger" who would prepare the way of the Lord (*Matt. 11:10, Mark 1:2, Luke 7:27; compare Mal. 3:1*).

Note the main aspects of John's message. In what way is his message one of heart-turning? *Matt. 3:2, 8; 14:4; Mark 1:4; Luke 3:3, 8, 9, 11, 13, 14.*

Like a farmer who plows hard ground to prepare it to receive seed, John denounced sin and urged sinners to repent. Human nature is such that, without self-examination, without an awareness of one's true condition, no need is felt for something better. His message turned people toward the holiness of God's requirements and their need of His perfect righteousness. Genuine repentance is always marked by humility and looking to God for help to change one's behavior. By exposing the shallow, self-centered hypocrisy of those who claimed Abraham as their father, he sought to open the deeper meaning of the faith of their fathers.

How did the message of John the Baptist prepare the way for Jesus? *John 1:35-37, 3:27-30.*

John had been shown that Jesus was the Lamb of God. When he introduced Jesus this way (*John 1:29, 36*), he literally turned people to the Lord. Andrew and another of John's disciples, John—the Gospel writer who wrote the account of that day—left the Baptist's side and became the first of Jesus' disciples. Not only does the Elijah message point to the need for repentance; it identifies the One who saves from sin, generates excitement about Him, and introduces people to Him.

If John the Baptist were to step into your home, what do you think he would be saying to you?

invitation made, one Scripture read, one prayer offered, one life saved.” Today, Jim is a building contractor. He loves the Lord and his family and is active in his church. That is what heart turning is all about!

The story of the prodigal son (*Luke 15:11-32*) is really about two sons. One was lost, because he had left home after rejecting his spiritual heritage. The other was lost because he stayed for the wrong reasons. Heart turning was necessary for both of them.

If we and our families are going to be ready to meet Jesus someday soon, some of us will need to return home, and some will need to change our reasons for staying. Some will need to seek forgiveness and healing in certain relationships, while some will need to seek new ways of confronting. It is called the Elijah message; and it promises to revolutionize our denomination.

Witnessing

“Decided proclamations of truth are to be made. But in regard to this line of work I am instructed to say to our people: Be guarded. In bearing the message make no personal thrusts at other churches. . . . Let us be careful of our words. Let not our ministers follow their own impulses in denouncing and exposing the mysteries of iniquity. Upon these themes often silence is eloquence.

“Many are deceived. Speak the truth in tones and words of love. Let Christ be exalted. Keep to the affirmative of truth. Never leave the straight path God has marked out, for the purpose of giving someone a thrust. That thrust may do much harm and no good. It may quench conviction in many minds. . . .

“People cannot be expected to see at once the advantage of truth over the error they have cherished. The best way to expose the fallacy of error is to present the evidence of truth. This is the greatest rebuke that can be given to error. Dispel the cloud of darkness resting on minds by reflecting the bright light of the Sun of Righteousness. . . .

“There are many souls to be saved. In words and deed be wise unto salvation, representing Christ to all with whom you come in contact. Let all see that your feet are shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace and goodwill to men. Wonderful are the results we shall see if we enter the work imbued with the Spirit of Christ. If we carry the Word forward, in righteousness, mercy, and love, help will come in our necessity. Truth will triumph and bear away the victory.”—Ellen G. White, *Reflecting Christ*, p. 240.

If we take these counsels to heart, our work will not be marred by harshness, arrogance, or incivility. Our work of proclaiming the three angels’ messages demands a high level of spiritual ambassadorship that honors its calling to a ministry of reconciliation for leading spiritually misled souls to God. (*See 2 Cor. 5:18-20, 2 Tim. 2:23-26.*)

Turning Hearts in the Last Days

In a sense, we as Adventists see ourselves in the role of John the Baptist. The herald of reform and repentance sought to prepare the way for the first coming of Jesus; we, as a movement, see ourselves doing the same for the Second Coming.

Read prayerfully Luke 1:17. How do these words capture our message?

The heavenly Father has turned the hearts of His children back to Himself and has turned the hearts of His children to one another through the Cross of Christ. The Elijah message pleads with families to believe this incredible good news (*2 Cor. 5:18-21; compare Eph. 2:11-18*) and to be people filled with grace as His Spirit yields a harvest of love in them.

The world needs desperately a demonstration of unselfish caring, lasting commitment, and unswerving devotion to God. By God's grace Christian families can provide such a demonstration. Yet, we must remember that the message we have for the world is also for ourselves. Until the principles of gospel, of unity, of love, of self-sacrifice are made manifest among us, especially in our own families, we will be powerless to share this message with others. All the eloquent sermons, all the logic and biblical presentations, aren't enough: The world needs to see manifest in our lives, especially in our family lives, the repentance, the turned hearts, the love, and the commitment we preach about. Just as John the Baptist had a power that changed lives and made his preaching effective, we can do the same through the grace of God, but only to the degree in which we are willing to cooperate.

We are, through Jesus, part of the family in heaven (*Eph. 3:15*). Thus, whether we are a family of one or more, we are called to be witnesses for the God we profess to serve, and nothing can make our witness more effective than to show the world what a family, regardless of its size, can be through the power of the gospel.

What can you do, in a special way, to show those closest to you, whether immediate family or others, that you love and care about them?

Life-Application Approach

Icebreaker: A church was once built in the middle of farmland. Over the years, farm after farm was bought out and replaced by multimillion-dollar homes. The church took upon itself the task of reaching out to the affluent families in the neighborhood. Fifteen years went by, and there was no fruit to show for their efforts. Then one day, the mansion across from the church went up in flames. One of the first phone calls the family of the home made was to the church! And the church reached out. (Unfortunately, once the crisis was over, the family had no need for the church!)

Thought Questions:

❶ Read God’s promise in Psalm 121:7, 8. How can you make yourself available to God? How can you be attuned to those around you? Ask God to help you aid someone in need. As in the icebreaker, how can we encourage ourselves when we feel used?

❷ “Bernard Newman tells how once he stayed in a Bulgarian peasant’s house. All the time he was there the daughter was stitching away at a dress. He said to her, ‘Don’t you ever get tired of that eternal sewing?’ ‘O no!’ she said, ‘you see this is my wedding dress.’ Work done for love always has a glory.”—Barclay, “The Letters to the Philipians, Colossians, and Thessalonians,” *The Daily Study Bible*, revised edition, p. 186. Expound on the benefits of focusing on the Second Coming while working in God’s vineyard.

❸ Just as a tree is identified by its leaves and fruit, a person is identified by words and by deeds. As the Second Coming draws nearer, a true believer will be identified with the church, and this will not always be a positive identification. How can you fortify your spiritual life to enable you to defend your beliefs and your church?

Application Question:

“Your true value to society comes when someone says, ‘Let me see your work.’ Your glib tongue may open a door or two. . . . But the real test of your worth can be measured by the care you give to the job in front of you: A budget to plan; A solo to play; A report to draft; A leaky sink that needs fixing. Next time you write a memo, make sure you get all the facts straight. Pay attention to those details. Sweat the small stuff.”—Swindoll, *Come Before Winter and Share My Hope*, pp. 91, 92. What concrete steps can your church take to be noticed by its community?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, “Carmel,” *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 143–154; “The Voice in the Wilderness,” *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 97–108.

A message to prepare a people. “Our message must be as direct as was that of John. He rebuked kings for their iniquity. Notwithstanding the peril his life was in, he never allowed truth to languish on his lips. Our work in this age must be as faithfully done.”—Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1184.

Discussion Questions:

- 1** As a class, discuss the relevance of the Elijah message to your local church. What can you do to help your church understand the message and its role in helping to spread it?
- 2** Have those who are willing share with the class their own personal experiences of having their hearts turned. What changes came about? What difference did this experience have upon their lives and the lives of their families?
- 3** If we see ourselves in the role of John the Baptist, what should we expect to happen to us? What is the implicit message in that answer?
- 4** As a class, work on a paragraph, a kind of “Declaration of Family Principles,” that best encapsulates what the biblical idea for a family is. Be prepared to share it with the whole church.

Summary: An appeal for faith in God and acceptance of His reconciling gospel of grace is going forth today just before Christ returns. A positive response to this good news alone secures the bonds of earthly children to the heavenly Father, as well as parents and children to one another.