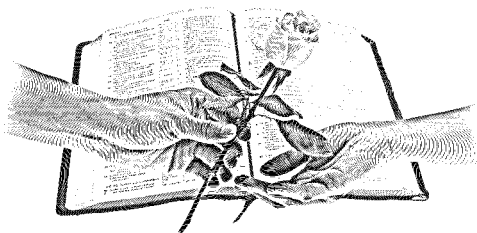


Homes of Peace and Healing



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Ps. 37:8, Matt. 5:22, 12:1-14, 18:15-18, Mark 7:6-13, Phil. 2:1-16, Col. 3:12-15.*

Memory Text: “ ‘Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid.’ ” (*John 14:27, NIV*).

The Week at a Glance: The Bible gives us principles that, if applied, can help minimize family conflict and turmoil.

The schoolchildren were trying out a new seesaw. The bigger and heavier kids moved closer to the center; lighter riders stayed out at the end. Once everyone was balanced, each child got a good ride. Things went fine until some mischievous bigger boys seemed to get pleasure from bouncing girls in the air like rag dolls until they screamed to get off. Then kids started piling on at opposite ends, each side trying to outweigh the other. Before long, the seesaw, the toy that had been the setting of so much fun, became a painful place. No one wanted to ride on it anymore.

Family life is sometimes like a seesaw. Life is more pleasant when people respect and care for others. Sadly, individuals experience pain when some use their status or position in the family to dominate, control, or treat others harshly. This week's lesson looks at ways relationships run into difficulty and how God, in His Word, provides insights that help His children move from hurt to healing.

**Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 4.*

Saints Have Family Problems Too

“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (*Eph. 4:3, NIV*).

Christian believers possess by faith the precious spiritual reality of being seated in heavenly places with Christ (*Eph. 2:6*). In daily life, as they await His return and their removal from the presence of sin, some tension, discord, even conflict may occur. This is a part of the human experience with intimate relationships (*Gal. 5:17*). Friction can come because people differ widely in disposition, habits, education, and ways of looking at things. Families must find ways to respect the individuality of each member yet be able to function and enjoy life as a close-knit group. The mark of healthy Christian relationships is not only keeping conflicts to a minimum but surmounting, in ways that accord with the gospel, those conflicts that do come.

How does the Bible teach God’s people to deal with the conflicts that may arise among them? Summarize the principles in *Matthew 18:15-18*, *Philippians 2:1-16*, and *Colossians 3:12-15*.

Christian love and tolerance enable many families to cope with great differences. Others find themselves in uncomfortable situations that must be remedied if unity and peace are to be maintained. Without resolution—anger, hostility, and distance may develop in the relationship. Facing conflict can be difficult; many avoid or shy away from it, deny it exists, or withdraw emotionally. Others determine to get their way at any cost, while many simply give in to keep peace.

Think back over family struggles you either have experienced or seen. What caused them? How might they have been more easily resolved? How could the principles seen in today’s text have made a big difference?

Putting Anger in Its Place

Scripture plainly condemns angry attitudes and behaviors that are destructive to individuals and relationships (*Gen. 49:6, 7; Ps. 37:8; Matt. 5:22; Gal. 5:19-21*). These belong to the “old man,” whom Christians are called to “put off” (*Eph. 4:31, Col. 3:8-10*). However, the Bible acknowledges that anger as an *emotion* is part of life in Christ (*Eph. 4:22-27*).

Anger sounds an alarm inside us when inequity or injustice is recognized or when there is oppression of the innocent. Moses felt this emotion in defense of God’s name and cause (*Exod. 32:19*); Jesus did, too, when His ministry, the Sabbath, and the man with the withered hand were all treated with coldhearted indifference by the religious leaders (*Mark 3:1-5*). Injustice aroused anger in David and Nehemiah (*compare 2 Sam. 12:5, Neh. 5:6*). Jacob loved Rachel (*Gen. 29:30*) but became angry when he felt accused unfairly by her (*30:1, 2*).

What do you think “In your anger, do not sin” (*Eph. 4:26, 27, NIV*) means for believers?

❶ “In your anger do not sin” indicates that the emotion of anger and sin are not one and the same. The feeling of anger is not sin in itself. Family members are to give each other permission to have this emotion and to report it without guilt.

❷ “Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry” (*Eph. 4:26, NIV*) indicates that anger is to be processed promptly. Final resolution of issues may take time, but anger can often be diffused by a “soft answer” (*Prov. 15:1*). “Soft answers” are caring responses that result from listening, accepting the person, and recognizing the deeper feelings such as fear, frustration, or hurt that triggered the anger. Getting behind the anger like this helps families clear things up and grow closer to each other.

Some people tend to blow up the instant they are angry; others hold it inside, where it seethes and festers. What is your own tendency, and what promises can you find in the Bible that can help you toward a more Christlike resolution of your anger?

Anguished Hearts

Unthinkable as it is, research reveals that the home is the single most violent place in society. Family violence touches all kinds of families, including Christian homes. Violence is an assault of any kind—verbal, physical, emotional, sexual, or active or passive neglect—that is committed by one person or persons against another in the family.

The Bible includes accounts of family violence, even among God’s people. What are your thoughts and feelings as you read these verses? Why do you think these stories were preserved in Scripture?

Gen. 37:17-28

2 Sam. 13:1-22

2 Kings 16:3, 17:17, 21:6

Though people today don’t burn their children on altars to pagan gods, what are some modern parallels to this same practice?

Abusive behavior is the conscious choice of a person to exercise power and control over another. It cannot be explained or excused by alcoholism, stress, the need to fulfill sexual desires, the need for better control of anger, or any behavior of the victim. Victims are not responsible for causing the abuser to abuse. Abusers distort and pervert love, for “love does no harm” (*Rom. 13:10, NIV*). Professional treatment can facilitate change in an abuser’s behavior but only if the person takes responsibility for the behavior and seeks such help. To those who will open themselves to His presence, God “is able to do exceedingly abundantly” to help abusers stop abusing, to repent of their attitudes and behavior, to make restitution in every way possible, and to embrace the qualities of agape love to heal their own hearts and to love others (*compare Eph. 3:20*).

Try to put yourself in the place of someone traumatized by violence. What words of acceptance, comfort, and hope would you like to hear? Why is it important to provide safety and caring acceptance rather than offering advice about how to live better with the abuser?

Twisting the Word

With which of these statements do you agree or disagree? Why?

- ❶ People who are abused should turn the other cheek.
- ❷ Wives should be submissive, regardless of what their husbands do to them.
- ❸ Violent behavior by a spouse or a parent is just a cross some people have to bear.
- ❹ The pain we encounter in life is ultimately for our good.

Victims of violence in Christian families need support to find safety for themselves and their children and to meet other practical and emotional needs. Times of domestic violence are times of great spiritual crisis. Where was God when I was being abused? Is God punishing me for something I have done or trying to teach me a lesson? Sometimes their deep-seated beliefs or the counsel they receive will have a tendency to prolong, rather than relieve, their situation.

No Christian principle supports or condones abuse. Those who seek biblical texts to defend their behavior are guilty not only of abuse but of perverting the Word of God. Christ championed the cause of the oppressed. It is His Spirit to love and accept, to affirm and build others up rather than to abuse or tear others down. His followers are called to rectify those religious and cultural beliefs that some may twist and pervert in order to justify or cover up family violence.

The New Testament has examples of people twisting doctrines in order to justify their own ways. See, for example, Matthew 12:1-14, Mark 7:6-13. Which Bible texts might some people pervert in an attempt to justify their abuse?

Victims need people who are sensitive and careful about offering hasty solutions or moralizing. Abused persons need help accessing the specialized help they need. While those seeking to help them encourage victims in getting professional care if possible, they also minister to them graciously and compassionately, providing them with stability in a time of unrest.

The Gift of Forgiveness

At the heart of Christianity is an incredibly wonderful concept—*forgiveness*. It is God’s gift to families when hearts and relationships have been wounded.

What do the following texts tell us about forgiveness? *Matt. 18:27, Luke 23:34, Rom. 5:6-11, Eph. 1:7.*

Through the Cross of Christ, forgiveness is offered, even before the offenders ask for it (*Luke 23:34; compare Acts 5:31, 13:38, 26:18*). By His grace God made a fountain that has washed us and invites us to come, repent, and be clean (*compare Rom. 2:4*). Humanly, forgiveness is a decision to let go of the destructive malice of revenge. We remind our wounded hearts that Christ has suffered for all sin, ours against God and that of others against us. We then pass forgiveness on. The hurt one is now freed within, whether or not the offender asks for forgiveness. It does not, however, free the wrongdoer from responsibility, from the need to repent, or from all the consequences of the abusive behavior.

What do these texts tell us about forgiveness? *2 Chron. 7:14, Matt. 18:32-35, 1 John 1:9.*

Notice the conditional “if” in these texts. If forgiveness is ultimately to be effective, there must be repentance on the part of the wrongdoer. Recognizable earmarks of true repentance include: stopping the offending behavior, giving a sincere apology, taking responsibility for the behavior and damage done, showing care for the pain of the wronged one, making restitution in every way possible, and making changes to protect against reoccurrence.

Reconciliation is not the same as forgiveness. For reconciliation to occur, both must want it and be willing to try to rebuild trust again. Over time, through open communication and consideration of each one’s needs and feelings, destructive relational patterns can change. Patterns of conflict resolution that meet the needs of both can be cultivated.

In what way does the assurance that we have been forgiven by God in Christ give us courage to offer forgiveness to a wrongdoer or to make a much-needed apology?

Further Study: Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 304–306; “The Measure of Forgiveness,” *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 243–251; *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 142; *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 100.

Justifiable indignation. “It is true there is an indignation that is justifiable, even in the followers of Christ. When they see that God is dishonored, and His service brought into disrepute, when they see the innocent oppressed, a righteous indignation stirs the soul. Such anger, born of sensitive morals, is not a sin. But those who at any supposed provocation feel at liberty to indulge anger or resentment are opening the heart to Satan. Bitterness and animosity must be banished from the soul if we would be in harmony with heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 310.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 What are some of the cultural attitudes that exist in your own society that help create an environment in which family abuse is tolerated? What can you as a class do to help church members be on guard against assimilating these attitudes?
- 2 For those who are willing (and only to an appropriate degree), talk about how their own family works through conflicts. What have they learned from their own experiences that could help others facing similar challenges?
- 3 Discuss the difference between forgiveness and what sometimes is mistaken for forgiveness—tolerance, excusing the wrongdoer, absorbing the blame, or rationalizing the hurtful behavior. Why is it so important to know the difference?

Summary: Some conflict can be expected in close relationships. Often, through prayerful use of scriptures that teach about relationships, these can be reduced and managed by Christians.

The Accident That Saved His Life

by MASAMI TANAKA

Masami lay in the emergency room trying to answer the doctor and the police's questions. "I was driving, then I lost control of the car. It skidded. Then I heard a thud. The next thing I remember was crawling out of the car."

Masami had suffered only a few bruises in the crash, so the doctors released him from the hospital that night. He could find no bus or taxi, so he walked several miles to his home.

During the days following his accident, Masami had time to think about life and his near-fatal crash. He could not deny the conviction that something—or someone—had saved him from death. But who?

Masami had resented all religion and was glad when he no longer had to follow the foolish beliefs his father had taught him. He did not need his father's god—or any god. He could care for himself.

After the accident, he was willing to admit that some powerful deity might exist somewhere. He remembered an acquaintance who attended a Christian church. Perhaps he could ask his friend to help him sort out what had happened to him. He contacted his friend and asked which church he attended. Masami decided to visit the church—not every week, but occasionally. He knew little about God, but he enjoyed the fellowship and the Bible study. He found his commitment to God increasing. This is a faith I can believe in, he told himself. It's not like my father's religion.

Two years after he began attending the church, he was baptized.

He met some volunteer missionaries who were teaching English and giving Bible studies in Osaka. He feels that God sent them to show God's love and compassion to him, giving him a strong tie with the church. Throughout his life God provided good people to guide him and strengthen him. He met his wife in church, and she strengthens him. God's presence had never been conspicuous in his life before he invited Him in to live in his life. But Masami is sure that He was always there, watching over him, protecting him.

Masami has had several accidents and experiences since then that have developed his faith. As his faith was growing, he had another accident. Falling while playing ball, he fell and broke both wrists. Because he had no serious pain, he did not go to a surgeon. But some time later he began feeling pain in his shoulders. The doctor examined him but found nothing wrong with his shoulders. A little further investigation led to the old break in his wrists. The doctor x-rayed and found that the wrist bones had both been broken and had never healed. He had to have surgery on both wrists. This was not good news, but it gave him time to spend with God. While he was still in the hospital after the surgery, his church called and asked him to work with the youth.

To this day God has led him gently, kindly. He wants to let many people know about this wonderful God. He would like to do whatever he can to bring others to God.

MASAMI TANAKA is a businessman living in Osaka, Japan. He is active in the Osaka Central Church.