

SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH  
WEST JAMAICA CONFERENCE

FAMILY MINISTRIES DEPARTMENT

*presents*

## HOME AND MARRIAGE WEEK SERMONS



for  
February 3-9, 2013

Theme:  
**Families Reaching Out**

*President: Pastor A. D. Bowers*  
*Director: Pastor Joel Haye*  
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## Responsive Reading: Reaching Out as a Church Family

*Reader:* “And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in all the world as a witness to all the nations, and then the end will come” *Matthew 24:14.*

**Congregation:** “. . . in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed”  
**Genesis 12: 3.**

*Reader:* “Therefore, having obtained help from God, to this day I stand, witnessing both to small and great . . .” *Acts. 26:22.*

**Congregation:** “. . . in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed”  
**Genesis 12: 3.**

*Reader:* “Do not forget to entertain strangers, for by so doing some have unwittingly entertained angels” *Hebrews 13: 3.*

**Congregation:** “. . . in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed”  
**Genesis 12: 3.**

*Reader:* “. . . for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me” *Matthew 25:35-36.*

**Congregation:** “. . . in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed”  
**Genesis 12: 3.**

*Reader:* “Then the righteous will answer Him saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? Or when did we see You sick or in prison, and come to You?’” *Matthew 25: 37-39.*

**Congregation:** **“ . . . in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” Genesis 12: 3.**

*Reader:* *“And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me” Matthew 25:40.*

**Congregation:** **“ . . . in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” Genesis 12: 3.**

*Reader:* *“But the end of all things is at hand; therefore be serious and watchful in your prayers. And above all things have fervent love for one another . . . Be hospitable to one another . . .” 1 Peter 4:7-9.*

**Congregation:** **“ . . . in you all the families of the earth shall be blessed” Genesis 12: 3.**

Sunday, February 3, 2013



# Choosing A Winning Response

By Willie and Elaine Oliver

The Texts: Proverbs 17:27; James 1:19

## *Introduction*

Last February we were in South Africa for two weeks to speak at several events for the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division. On our road trip from Mossel Bay to Cape Town, our hosts suggested we visit the Cango Caves.

The Cango Caves are located at the foothills of the Swartberg mountain range near the town of Oudtshoorn, in the Western Cape Province of South Africa. At the caves there is a standard tour and an *adventure tour*. The *adventure tour* consists of climbing up steep rock formations and crawling through narrow passages, the most challenging of them a little less than 12 inches in diameter.

That Friday morning we arrived at the Cango Caves a little before noon just as a tour was about to begin. Noticing the following tour was an hour away, and wanting to get to Cape Town before sunset, we hurriedly purchased tickets and joined the tour that was taking off. Being unaware of the two options, we were several minutes into the tour when we realized we had chosen the *adventure tour*. The tour was true to its name by way of complexity, challenge, difficulty, and inconvenience.

Close relationships and especially marriage are a lot like the experience we had at the Cango Caves. The people outside the caves appeared excited about what they were getting ready to experience. The people inside—living the challenge and inconvenience of a damp, dark, dangerous, and restricted space—seemed in a hurry and anxious to get out.

We had to remain alert, careful, determined, focused, and positive to make it through the adventure tour. The truth is, once inside the belly of the caves there was no turning back.

Today we will explore a few realities about marriage and other important relationships; the choices we must make to navigate the often challenging, inconvenient, complex, and rough waters of these relationships, and arrive safely to the other shore by the grace, mercies and power of God

## ***The Bible on Relationships***

In the book of Proverbs 17:27, the word of God declares: “He who has knowledge spares His words, *And* a man of understanding is of a calm spirit.”

Sometimes the Book of Proverbs seems to value nothing so much as appropriate words. This is because it views words as the index to the soul. By paying attention to what a person says (and indeed to how much he or she says), one can determine whether a person is wise or a fool. Words are the fruit that show the quality of the heart (Garrett 2001).

In James 1:19, the author offers, “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath.”

Christians can pretend to obey God without truly listening to his commands. The readers of James’s letter knew the transforming power of God’s Word, the gospel. James urged them to demonstrate this change, particularly in their speech. He began by courteously addressing them as my dear brothers, and then challenged them to be *quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry*. The commands probably refer both to our relationships to one another and to God. We are to be quick to hear and slow to talk both toward other people and toward God

The command to be *quick to listen*, calls for an eagerness to hear and obey God’s message. The appeal to be *slow to speak*, demands silence until we have understood and applied the message. It is a call for restraint lest we produce hasty, ill-timed reactions. The challenge to be *slow to become angry* warns against hostile, bitter feelings. We cannot hear God if we remain distracted with resentment, hatred, or vengeful attitudes.

Our society encourages us to express our feelings, whether good or bad, peaceful or inflammatory, godly or ungodly. James 1:19, however, pictures the wise person as one who listens to God and others, deliberates a response carefully, and answers with cautious words (Lea 1999).

## ***Empirical Research on Relationships***

According to investigation done by marriage researchers Howard J Markman, Scott M Stanley, and Susan L Blumberg, there are four patterns that have been identified in marriages that are unhappy: escalation, negative interpretations, invalidation, and withdrawal and avoidance.

**Escalation** is when one spouse says something that is not very nice; then the other spouse responds by saying something even worse about the other. Before soon they are both screaming at each other, and what was a relatively harmless conversation has now turned into a marriage in serious distress. The difference between unhappy couples and happy couples is the way they handle this pattern. Happy couples know how to identify escalation before it takes place and simply remain quiet until the storm is passed.

Negative Interpretations is another pattern that destroys the stability of a marriage. One of the spouses makes a statement or a gesture, and it is interpreted more negatively by

the other spouse than it was meant to be. Happy couples tend to give each other the benefit of the doubt, and when in doubt ask for clarification rather than thinking the worst.

**Invalidation** is another pattern that characterizes unhappy couples. This is when the husband or the wife puts down their spouse in subtle or not so subtle ways, dismissing the other persons wants, needs, and emotional wellbeing.

One can invalidate one's spouse simply by constantly talking over them; putting down anything they say; taking their feelings for granted; for example, the couple is getting ready to go out to eat and the husband says: "Sweetie, I'd like to have Mexican food tonight." And the wife without missing a beat says: "Let's try the new Thai restaurant that opened on Main street a few weeks ago.

Or the wife says after coming home late from work: "I am so tired! I've been on my feet all day taking care of customers at the store, and the traffic was horrendous." And, without skipping a beat or acknowledging his wife's feelings, the husband says: "I am also very tired." While it is not wrong to be tired, it is a problem not to acknowledge your spouse's feelings and begin talking about your own.

After a while, communication will break down, the husband or wife disconnects from the relationship, and another family becomes the casualty of a marriage gone sour that could have been prevented.

**Withdrawal and Avoidance** is the last of these four patterns identified by the University of Denver marriage researchers we mentioned before. This is when one of the spouses totally disengages from the relationship by avoiding the other one as often as possible, because it is simply too painful to deal with a disconnected spouse (Markman, et al., 2001, pp. 13-31).

John M Gottman, noted marriage and family researcher suggests *Seven Principles for Making Marriage Work*:

**Be familiar with each other's worlds.** Do something to nurture that closeness every day. Know her likes and dislikes. What he likes to eat and what he dislikes about Christmas. Be emotionally intelligent; high EQ, instead of just a high IQ.

**Nurture your fondness and admiration for each other.** We like to flirt with each other when we are leaving home in the morning. It is our way of conveying our love and admiration for each other.

**Turn toward each other instead of away from each other.** Talk to each other instead of turning to Facebook for voyeuristic enjoyment. Pay attention to your wife. Pay attention to your husband. Talk about silly things together. The fact that you are engaging each other in conversation will connect you and make your marriage stronger.

**Allow your partner to influence you.** Develop habits that got there because your spouse influenced you. It flatters your spouse; it connects you to each other. It is a part of the glue that keeps you together.

**Solve your solvable problems.** Not every issue between you needs to be solved. If you have been married for 10 or 15 years you will never be young like when you first got married. Get over it. You have each other. Don't sweat the small stuff. The truth is; it is all small stuff compared to the love God has given you in each other. When you talk about the solvable problems, "soften the start up." Since women are more likely to want to solve the problems, avoid nagging and insulting your husband when you approach the issue. The first few seconds of a conversation will determine how the rest of it will go. Begin with sweetness. You will achieve much more with that kind of attitude.

**Overcome gridlock.** We all have things we don't really like about our spouse. Welcome to the human race. You didn't marry a perfect man or woman. Neither did your spouse. There are no perfect marriages because there are no perfect people. Get over it.

I (Willie) had arthroscopic knee surgery 18 years ago to repair a torn meniscus. It got better after surgery, but every now and then it still hurts. Guess what? I don't go in the back room and cut off my leg because it isn't perfect, I've learned to live with it as best I can. It is my knee.

Often there is gridlock in our relationships because someone doesn't like peas, or Indian food, or watching football. Accept the differences and decide to work with what you have chosen. You've heard the saying: "If life gives you lemons, make lemonade." We know many individuals who married people who turned out to be lemons. Hey, make lemonade, and life will be much better than it has been for the past several years. Choose a different attitude, a different response, a winning response, and the situation will become bearable.

Of course, we are not talking about being abused by your spouse, or that you should get used to your spouse cheating on you. These are issues that should not exist in a marriage. If they are present one should get professional help to remove the offending habit. But don't throw away your marriage because he doesn't look like he did 20 years ago.

**Create shared meaning.** Invariably people marry each other but live separate lives. They never engage in each other's special pass times; don't worship together; don't read the same books or enjoy the same cuisine. He loves the mountains; she loves the beach; and they do vacations separately.

If you have the first six principles you will have a good marriage. To have a great marriage you will need to create a culture that's just between the two of you. It's the kind of stuff that binds you together; that has a rhythm only the two of you understand.

The wise man, Solomon, and the writer of James, both have prescriptions for improving and maintaining healthy relationships—whether in marriage; between parents and children; adult siblings; church board members; or any other meaningful relationships in our lives (Gottman 1999).

## ***The Bible and Empirical Research Agree***

Solomon declares in Proverbs 17:27: “He who has knowledge spares his words, And a man of understanding is of a calm spirit.” And James 1:19, 20 submits: “So then, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak, slow to wrath; for the wrath of man does not produce the righteousness of God.” These verses truly summarize what the researchers above found in their investigations about relationships.

Many years ago when he was our pastor in Washington, DC, Dr. John Nixon expounded in one of his Sabbath sermons: “When you are working on your marriage, you are working on your salvation.”

And it was Ellen White who indicated under inspiration:

“The presence of Christ alone can make men and women happy. All the common waters of life Christ can turn into the wine of heaven. The home then becomes as an Eden of bliss; the family, a beautiful symbol of the family in heaven” (White, 1952, p. 28).

## ***Conclusion***

Despite the complexity, challenge, difficulty, and inconvenience of going through the Cango Caves in South Africa—once we made it through the experience—we felt a sense of accomplishment, completion, success and triumph. There was a sense of purpose and pride.

During the challenging and difficult places in the caves, we said to ourselves many times: “We will never do this again! This is insane! I will never like the Cango Caves on Facebook!” Once on the other side, however; after the victory; the challenge felt achievable, doable, feasible, and probable. We knew we could do this again!

In the book of Colossians 2: 9, 10, the Word of God declares: “For in Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him, who is the head of all principality and power.”

In response to these verses of Scripture, Charles H Spurgeon, the great British preacher of the 19th century acknowledged: “All the attributes of Christ, as God and man, are at our disposal. All the fullness of the Godhead, whatever that marvelous term may mean, is ours to make us complete” (Spurgeon, 2006 [May 18]).

Yes, our brothers and sisters, close relationships of any kind, including relationships among church members, as well as relationships in marriage and family are complex, challenging, difficult, and at times inconvenient. However, we should always choose a winning response and know that the grace, mercy, and power of God are at our disposal, so we can claim the victory, and rebuke Satan as a liar.

We urge you to trust God today, so that despite the trouble among members of the church family, your marriage or relationship with your children or other family members, you will not see this as an situation to get out of, but as an opportunity to



choose a response that will bring calm, joy, and peace to the church, to your home, and a witness to the matchless power of Jesus.

May God help us to this end is our prayer.

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Wednesday, February 6, 2013

# Beginning At Home

By Jongimpi Papu

Text: Mark 5:22-24, 35-43.

## *Introduction*

Our theme and emphasis for this year is, *families reaching out*. Outreach is the life blood of the Adventist church but is it the lifeblood of Adventist families? The statement by Ellen White puts this in proper perspective, when she says, “Missionaries for the Master are best prepared for work abroad in the Christian household. . .” (White, 1952, p. 317). This makes the family a missionary school where the actual and effective preparation of missionaries takes place.

In Matthew 28:19 we find the marching orders for the church, “Go ye therefore and make disciples of all nations. . .” I am sure the early church may have thought of pagan regions in far flung places they need to travel to as they in obedience to the commission. In Acts 1:8, Jesus instructs His disciples to begin in “Jerusalem, then Judea and Samaria and to the end of the world”. Doing mission to the ends of the world is only possible and effective if we start in Jerusalem. We can never accomplish the mission of making disciples of the nations if our children are not discipled for Christ.

Einstein is known for the complex theory of relativity, which has contributed greatly to science; but Jairus is known for his role in being instrumental in bringing back his daughter to life. The parents of this daughter were not only responsible for bringing their child to life, but the record shows they also brought life to their child. The message to the dying world will have more power if families are alive to reach out to the world.

The title for our message is, *Beginning at Home*.

## ***The Story***

The story is recorded in all three gospels and all three bring out details that are unique to each gospel. In Mark and Luke, the father of the daughter is identified as Jairus, the ruler of the synagogue. Matthew does not give the name of the father, but he also refers to him as the ruler of the synagogue. All three, in other words, are in agreement when it comes to the position or authority of this man.

We also see that Luke refers to the daughter as the *only* daughter and indicates that she was twelve years old (vs. 42). Mark refers to her as the little daughter and later adds that she was twelve years old (vs. 42) as if to give reason why she was able to walk after being raised to life. To Matthew the daughter is just referred to as *my daughter* and no age is mentioned.

It is clear as one reads the story from the three gospels that this child was Jairus' little daughter of twelve years of age. It is not clear what is meant by *only daughter*, was she the only daughter among boys or the only child? If she was the only daughter and not the only child then she probably was the last-born since she is referred to as little daughter. If there were other children in the family, probably Christ would have asked them to remain behind and be witnesses to the raising of the dead child. Since this is absent we can conclude she was the only child.

According to Matthew the child was already dead when the father approached Jesus. The other two gospels record that she was at the point of death. Was she dead or at the point of death? Maybe we will go with the majority since Ellen White also accepts their view (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 343). The SDA Commentary gives the view that the girl was *all but dead*. The situation of this girl was so critical that even when the father was told she was dead, he was not surprised. If she was at the point of death when he left her, anything could have happened.

## ***Jairus as a Ruler of the Synagogue***

All three gospels agree that Jairus was the ruler or one of the rulers of the synagogue. This man occupied a very important position in the Jewish religious system. We get a glimpse of this in Luke 13 where we find a ruler of the synagogue rebuking Christ for healing on Sabbath. The rulers of the synagogue were in actual fact part of the group that had a problem with Christ, accusing him for undermining the law of Moses.

As a ruler of the synagogue, it would have been easier for him to send one of the deacons to Jesus to come and heal his child. As a man and a husband, Jairus had taken it upon himself the responsibility of bringing his child into this world. As a matter of principle, he was not about to delegate the task of bringing life to his only daughter to another person. He showed boldness in approaching Christ in the public view and begging Him to heal his daughter.

As part of his responsibility as a ruler of the synagogue, Jairus may have been expected to reach out to the Jewish families in one way or another. But for him the best way of achieving this was to begin at home. Reaching out to his dying child became the best

and most effective method in reaching out to the dying world. He would not allow the prejudice of his colleagues to derail him from the mission of saving his daughter.

Jairus epitomizes the following statement very well, “The world is not so much in need of great minds, as of good men, who are a blessing in their homes” (White, 1948, p. 204). Jairus may have been known for his sterling work in the synagogue, but it was his ministry at home that set him apart. It is easy to reach out to dying souls in the world while our own children are languishing at home.

The healing of Jairus’ daughter would undoubtedly become the basis for an extended ministry, which would include the synagogue. It would be easier for him to invite Jesus to his synagogue now that He had been to his house and had healed his daughter. Our witness for Jesus to others is strengthened by what He has done in our own lives and our own families.

Jairus had shown faith in Jesus. His position did not prevent him from begging for mercy. He went to Christ believing that his daughter would be healed, “Come and lay your hands on her that she may be healed and she will live” Mark 5:23.

If Jairus, as a ruler of the synagogue, had harbored any resentment against Christ, his child would probably have died. It is often the attitude of the parents toward Christ that can prove to be a blessing or a curse to their children. This can be seen in the attitude we have against those who have been tasked by the church to take care of our children. Sometimes the very people who are assisting in the discipleship of our children are the subject of gossip during Sabbath lunch. This is even worse when it happens in the presence of the very children who look up to these leaders. Jairus left a legacy for his daughter, one that reminded his daughter God could be trusted.

### ***Jairus as a Father***

It is very clear that Jairus loved his little daughter. He loved her more than his position in the synagogue. He was willing to risk his reputation for his dying child. The unusual thing about this story is that it features a relationship between a father and a daughter, something very unique in the gospels. Women have always been in the forefront when it comes to the salvation of their children. It was a group of women who brought the children to Christ to be blessed. The fathers were busy arguing with Christ on the theology of divorce.

One could possibly understand if the child were a son, for that was the pride of every Jewish father. Here we see a father going all out to ensure that his daughter is healed. It is likely that giving birth to a daughter in that culture was not viewed as an important event. There are cultures in some parts of the world where the birth of a girl child is regarded as a non-event. One is not regarded as having children if he has daughters only.

It is an open secret that women were not highly esteemed in the Jewish culture.

Notwithstanding the negative view the cultures may have had against women, this man, by the name of Jairus would not be deterred in seeking help for his daughter.

He lovingly called his daughter, *my little* daughter. The age of twelve was regarded as legal age for marriage in the Jewish culture of the day. This is probably the reason why Mark and Luke deliberately indicate that she was twelve years of age. The point is that this girl was not a child or an infant. So the word little is not referring to age or level of maturity but is a word of endearment. She was beloved by her father. No wonder he left everything and sought the help of Jesus.

We are living in a time when girls are abused by their parents and in particular their fathers. This is, of course, encouraged by the negative view most cultures and societies have against women. In spite of the culture of the day, God still has men who are willing to risk everything for their daughters and their children. There is a Jairus in every community.

Our prayer is that we may have more of them and that you too can be one of them. These are fathers who regard the welfare of their children more importantly than their careers. They may be pastors, elders, or officers in the church, but their priority lies with their children. They know that they cannot win the world if they cannot reach out to their *little daughters*. Ministry at home prepares us for ministry in the synagogue.

### ***Jairus as a Husband***

When Jesus came to the house of Jairus, he asked all to leave except the three disciples and the parents. According to Matthew those people were making noise. The other gospel writers also report that they laughed when Jesus said the child was not dead. Ellen White says when Jesus came he found the hired mourners and flute players making noise as a way of mourning the death of the girl (White, 1898, p. 343). They had given up on the child and had become a nuisance and a stumbling block to what Christ was about to do.

In Luke 8:51, we are told that only James, Peter, John and the parents were allowed to be with Jesus. Jesus recognizes the role of Jairus and his wife by inviting them to be with Him as He ministers to their dead child. This was also recognition of the intimate relationship between Jairus and his wife. If Jairus and his wife were not in harmony, probably they would have never presented their child to Jesus. Instead of calling on Jesus for help they would have remained quarreling and blaming each other for the sickness and death of their child. It is “the atmosphere that surrounds the souls of the parents” that makes a home a missionary center (White, 1952, pp. 15, 16).

It is interesting to note that in that room we had Jesus who is the Savior, the one who calls upon all to accept Him. He is the one who was lifted up so that all families may be drawn to Him. We also had disciples, God’s instruments in reaching out to lost humanity. Today ministers, Sabbath school leaders, youth leaders and many others play that role. The parents were invited to remain behind also; it was their responsibility to lead their own child to Christ.

Sabbath school; youth and pathfinder ministries play a very important role, but these should never take away the parents’ responsibility of bringing their children to Jesus (White, 1952, p. 188).

As long as there is cooperation between the church and the family there is hope for our children. But this begins with the parents and it begins at home.

### ***Reaching Out. . .***

When the child woke up, she probably saw her parents hand in hand with tears of joy in their eyes and standing beside her bed. She, also, may have noticed the four strangers whose faces beamed with joy. She probably was later told how her parents refused to give up even when she was declared dead. You will never find a birthday present that will surpass this one. This was a gift of life, a second chance.

Christ instructed them to keep quiet and not tell anyone about this event. This was a tall order for this girl. Birthdays are a celebration of a natural process of life that occurs every minute. We may hide our years but we usually do not hide our birthdays. How would this child and this family celebrate the day she was brought back to life? This could never remain a secret besides, the whole village knew about the miracle.

Imagine this girl telling her friends about what had happened. You can almost hear the excitement in her voice as she tells them how her parents refused to give up even when the whole community had given up. Wait until you hear her tell them about Jesus. She was not taken to Jesus, but Jesus came to her— right into her bedroom to give her the gift of life. Yes while other children would be celebrating their birthdays, she would forever be grateful for the day Christ gave her the gift of a second chance.

The parents would find it difficult to keep quiet—this was impossible to keep it locked inside their hearts. That family had a story and they were going to tell the whole world. It was their experience of what Jesus meant to them. For this family reaching out could never be a difficult task. Families can reach out if they have been enriched by the presence and the healing power of Jesus.

### ***Conclusion***

What was supposed to be a tragedy for that family became a blessing in many ways. The crisis of losing their child served as an opportunity of inviting Christ to their home. Deuteronomy 6 reminds us that every situation and every experience can be turned into a teaching moment. Reaching out to our family members prepares us for the mission beyond the boundaries of the home. We are reminded of the following words:

Sisters, go to work for your children. Will you show that you have a well ordered family? Then will you go to work for your neighbors? Will you then be a light and power in the church, because you have the light of the power of God? (White, 1994, p. 55)

We may find ourselves in a situation where our own children have not been reached for Christ. They may have opted through their own choice to serve other gods rather than the God of their parents. We may have done our best or may have even failed in our responsibility to reach out to our children. But, we can still reach out to the world and

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minister through our pain and tears. God knows the burden we bear and He calls us to come to Him to find rest. (Matthew 11:28-30).

### ***Appeal***

We have been commissioned to preach the gospel to the whole world. In order to do an effective work, we must begin at home. The Nobel Peace Prize goes to those who have played a significant role in impacting the lives of others in our society. A faithful mother and father who have accepted Christ as their personal Savior and labor for their children and family members may never qualify for this prize.

But, in the annals of heaven, the greatest are those who are a blessing in their homes. It is one thing to bring them into this life, but another to bring life—yes, eternal life to them as we disciple them for Christ.

Reaching out begins at home, but should never end there. Go ye therefore and be a blessing in your own home! The Holy Spirit is ready to empower us, are we ready to go? Who will go?

With Christ on our side we can reach out to the whole world, but this begins right at home.

May this be our experience  
today!

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All Scripture references are from the New King James Version.

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Sabbath, February 9, 2013



# Creating a Masterpiece

*By Claudio and Pamela Consuegra*

## *Introduction*

Michelangelo is quoted as saying, “Every block of stone has a statue inside it and it is the task of the sculptor to discover it.” It must be a marvelous experience to look at a block of stone and see what it could become. It must also be a wonderful thing to have the ability to take that piece of rock and fashion it to whatever we envision it to be. To chip away and remove the unnecessary pieces and free the final sculpture hidden inside.

But not every one of us is that talented. For some of us, when we look at a block of marble all we see is . . . a block of marble. And even if we envision what the block of marble could be, few of us have the talent or the ability to turn the marble into a masterpiece.

As parents, we have been given the opportunity to create a masterpiece with each of the children God has given us. As that precious, helpless little baby is born, we behold something more precious and valuable than all the marble in the world. And God has already begun the work of creating a masterpiece out of that bundle of flesh, blood, and love. Through the prophet Jeremiah God declares: “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you; Before you were born I sanctified you; I ordained you a prophet to the nations.” (Jeremiah 1:5, NKJV)

David described this wonderful process with poetic words: “For You formed my inward parts; “You covered me in my mother’s womb. I will praise You, for I am fearfully and wonderfully made. . . My frame was not hidden from You, When I was made in secret. . . Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed.” (Psalms 139:13-16, NKJV)

So, how can we as parents help create a masterpiece with our children’s lives? How can we help our children grow to be mature disciples of Jesus Christ?



## ***Reach out Spiritually***

One of the earliest and most direct passages in the Bible dealing with parenting is found in Deuteronomy 6:1-6. As the Israelites prepare to go into the land God had promised to give them as their inheritance, Moses reminds them of all they had seen and been taught for the last forty years. Since he would not be crossing the Jordan River with them, Moses provides them with all the instructions they need to not simply move to a new home, but with their children receive God's blessings and approval. So, Moses begins with the most important of spiritual beliefs: "Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one!" (v.4)

This is the solemn declaration Christians make to this day. We don't worship many deities, as some pagan religions do; we worship ONE God! Moses continues by explaining what worshipping God means: "You shall love the LORD your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength." (v.5)

Worship is not simply accepting a set of doctrines, following a list of rules, or behaving in a prescribed way. To worship God means to love him from the depths of our heart and soul until that love inundates our whole being and overflows toward others.

And then Moses gives parents their gospel commission:

"And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. 7 You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. 8 You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. 9 You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates." (vs.7-9)

Moses didn't give these instructions to the priests or the Levites or the leaders, but to all the parents then and now. It is our responsibility, as parents, to disciple our children, to help shape in them the image of God. This spiritual shaping happens when we talk with them about God, when we teach them about God's love and His sacrifice for them, when we display through words and actions His love flowing from and through us. While Moses speaks of formal teaching, he also speaks of the common conversations, the daily routines, the mundane acts, all of which should be permeated with the presence of God.

Comparing children's growth with that of Jesus', Ellen White writes:

"The physical constitution of Jesus, as well as His spiritual development, is brought before us in these words, "the child grew," and "increased in stature." In childhood and youth attention should be given to physical development. Parents should so train their children in good habits of eating and drinking, dressing, and exercise, that a good foundation will be laid for sound health in afterlife. The physical organism should have special care, that the powers of the body may not be dwarfed, but developed to their full extent. This places the children and youth in a favorable position, so that, with proper religious training, they may, like Christ, wax strong in spirit." (White, 1954, p. 187).

Ben Freudenburg cites studies that show four family practices that are particularly important in helping young people grow in faith (both in childhood and adolescence): (1) talking about faith with their mother; (2) talking about faith with their father; (3) having family devotions or prayer; and (4) doing family projects to help other people. Unfortunately, he writes, fewer than one-third of the youth reported any of these activities as happening often in the past or currently in their homes. (Freudenburg, B., and Lawrence, R., 1998, p. 17) George Barna's research affirms that in a typical week fewer than ten percent of parents who attend church regularly with their kids read the Bible together, pray together, or have family worship together. (Barna, G., 2002, p. 78).

The Valuegenesis\* studies conducted among Adventist young people also confirm the important role the parents play in transmitting their faith to their children not only by talking about their faith but by joining their children in participating in service projects in their community or missionary endeavors. (Bailey Gillespie, Donahue, Gane, and Boyatt, 2004, pp. 255-273). We cannot underestimate the importance of daily family worship, Bible study, and praying on a regular basis. If we are to bring the best image of God in our children, we need to make sure these three practices are a part of our daily family life.

\*Valuegenesis" is a research study into the faith and values of young people attending Seventh-day Adventist high schools in North America in the three areas of family, school and church. The first survey was conducted in 1990, a second major survey was conducted in 2000, and a third is taking place in 2010. Related studies also termed "Valuegenesis" have been conducted in other countries.

Reach out to your children spiritually.

### ***Reach out Emotionally***

Parents have the God-given responsibility to disciple their children so they can become disciples of Jesus Christ; children of God by their own choice. Our task as parents also involves helping shape the emotions of our children. A good self-image is one of the most important variables we can build into our children. A person's self-image is based not only on how they see themselves but also on how they perceive others, particularly those closest to them, see them. That's why what parents say to their children and how they act toward their children will contribute in great measure to their poor or healthy self-image.

Dr. Ed Young says there are at least ten building blocks to establish a child's self-image, enabling them to see themselves as God sees them.

1. We must express love to our children. That sounds so basic, but sadly enough many children never hear their parents say "I love you." You can't say it too much.
2. Be predictable. Children need stability, not constant change. Be consistent in your discipline, in your expectations, in your standards, and in your love.
3. Communicate clearly with your children. Do not expect them to read your mind. Remember that young children take things quite literally and do not understand

- nuances or subtleties as adults do. Speak clearly, in concrete terms, and only in short sentences which are enough for them to understand and absorb.
4. In addition, try to understand the source of behavior problems, instead of dealing only with the symptoms. Don't simply react to what they do but try to understand why they're doing it.
  5. Catch your children doing good! Sometimes the only attention children get is when they do something that gets them in trouble. Positive attention is better than negative attention; but negative attention is better than no attention at all! So, don't wait to catch your children when they're doing something wrong; catch them doing the right thing, and praise them for it.
  6. Provide a safe environment, emotionally and physically. Make your home a safe place for your child. The last four building blocks are just as important as the previous six.
  7. Set reasonable limits based on your child's age and development.
  8. Teach your child problem-solving skills. Don't do everything for them. It is normal for parents to want to help their children, but children, like all of us, also learn by trial and error. If they are never allowed to make mistakes they will never learn from them.
  9. Don't overreact. Ninety-nine percent of the things we parents lose our cool over are not life-altering. Stop to think for a moment if what they did warrants a huge reaction on your part. Remember these words: "A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger." (Proverbs 15:1, NKJV).
  10. Finally, be patient. Parenting is a long-term effort, and you cannot achieve all that you hope for in a day.

If you remember these things and strive each day to do them - with a word, a look, a touch - your child will have the foundation he/she needs to grow strong.

In a few short sentences, Ellen White encourages parents to draw close to their children so that they will grow emotionally healthy:

"Some parents do not understand their children and are not really acquainted with them. There is often a great distance between parents and children. If the parents would enter more fully into the feelings of their children and draw out what is in their hearts, it would have a beneficial influence upon them. The father and the mother should work together in full sympathy with each other. They should make themselves companions to their children. Parents should study the best and most successful manner of winning the love and confidence of their children, that they may lead them in the right path. They should reflect the sunshine of love upon the household." (White, 1952, p.190)

Reach out to your children spiritually.

Reach out to your children emotionally.

## ***Reach out with your children to those in need***

Building your children into mature adults includes the work of maturing spiritually and emotionally. This maturing is partly achieved through instruction, which is what Moses admonished the Israelites to do in Deuteronomy 6:1-7. This growth also takes place as parents interact with their children on a daily basis (the building blocks mentioned before). The third thing we can do to help our children mature as disciples of Jesus Christ is to show them that helping others helps us. Selfishness in the heart of a person destroys them and others. But a selfless, kind, and generous spirit is a blessing to all.

**[NOTE: THOSE WHO UTILYZE THIS SERMON MAY CHOSE TO USE THE FOLLOWING STORY IN THE THIRD PERSON OR SHARE YOUR OWN STORY]**

When I, Claudio, was a hospice chaplain, one of my responsibilities was to visit all our new patients to assess their spiritual needs. I recall visiting Jim, an AIDS patient who was living with his parents. AIDS was a recently discovered and diagnosed terminal disease and due to the lack of knowledge and unfounded fears many were afraid of be around AIDS patients lest they may get infected accidentally. In reality, as we have learned, one cannot become infected with the AIDS virus through casual contact like shaking hands or talking to a person. We had many enjoyable visits with Jim and his parents as his condition deteriorated with each passing day. Our daughters were quite young at the time – two and seven years old – when I took them with me to visit Jim and his family, something we all enjoyed. I remember when I brought them into Jim's parents' home the family brightened up. It was rare for them to have visitors, much less children, and our daughters' presence brought them much joy during this very sad time.

I didn't realize even then the impact those visits had on our daughters until recently when our older daughter, now an adult, mentioned them in one of our conversations. She was telling us she remembered Jim, and his parents, and their house. But what's most important, those visits opened their minds and hearts to the realities of the needs of those who are terminally ill and of those who through sin, their choices, or personal circumstances may be different than we are but are still in need of a loving touch.

This is what Jesus referred to when He said:

“Then the King will say to those on His right hand ‘Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: 35for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; 36I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me.’ 37“Then the righteous will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry and feed You, or thirsty and give You drink? 38When did we see You a stranger and take You in, or naked and clothe You? 39Or when did we see You sick, or in prison, and come to You?’ 40And the King will answer and say to them, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me.’ (Mat.25:34-40, NKJV).

The care of the needy is not limited to the sick. Several churches, including the one where I, Claudio, was the pastor at the time, worked together to provide food and clothing for the homeless in the large metropolitan area where we lived. There were many cold Saturday nights when together with church members our family went downtown with hot soup and sandwiches to feed those who had nowhere to sleep or live. How much and how many we helped we may never know, but I know of at least four people who were blessed every time we were there. Our children's characters are built when they take their eyes off themselves and look at the needs of others.

Again, Ellen White writes:

“With hearts filled with sympathy and compassion, they [church members] are to minister to those in need of help, bringing to sinners a knowledge of the Saviour's love. Such work calls for laborious effort, but it brings a rich reward. Those who engage in it with sincerity of purpose will see souls won to the Saviour, for the influence that attends the practical carrying out of the divine commission is irresistible.” (White, 1911, p. 109)

We want to have that joyous experience of bringing others to the Savior. It is a truly exhilarating experience. Why keep it to ourselves when we can share it with our children?

Reach out to your children spiritually.

Reach out to your children emotionally.

Reach out with your children to those in need.

### ***Reach out with your children to the World***

One of the most effective methods to help young people maintain their faith-commitment and to grow in spiritual maturity is by providing them with service-learning opportunities. As Diana Garland explains,

“Service-learning combines methods of experiential education with the needs of the neighborhood or larger community. It involves families in learning about needs, studying what the Bible has to say about those needs and the church's response, gaining knowledge and skills needed for service, engaging in service, and reflecting on these experiences.” (Garland, 1999, p. 388)

“In short, service-learning occurs ‘when service and learning are intertwined in ways that express Christian love and commitment. . .’” (Roehlkepartain, 1993, p. 11 from Garland, 1999, p. 389).

This does not mean that we simply ship our children to a different country, to go help people in another part of the world. While that can be a very positive and worthwhile

endeavor, it is more powerful when parents join their kids in service-oriented projects both in our own community and country and in other countries as well. When parents talk about faith and involve their children in service activities it doubles and sometimes triples their children's chances of living out their faith as adults. (DeVries, 2004, p. 63).

Many Adventist academies organize mission trips for their students. These are short-term mission opportunities which usually take place over the course of one to two weeks during their spring, Christmas vacation, or sometimes after the end of the school year. During those mission trips students help to build schools and churches, conduct vacation Bible school programs, and even preach at church or conduct evangelistic outreach programs in the communities they visit. The experience of leaving their home land to help people in other, more needy places has been a life-changing experience for many students and on many occasions they witness the result of their efforts by worshipping in a church building they have helped build, or visiting the classroom they helped construct and see the faces of young students smiling back at them with joy and appreciation. Many students have helped lead people to Christ, have walked with them to the waters of baptism, and have been the first ones to welcome them to the church family with a warm hug. Many students have also given their lives to Christ during mission trips, or have recommitted their lives to God and to His service. On occasion, parents of students have had the opportunity to go on those mission trips with their children to help chaperone the students, to work side by side with the young people, to offer their skills, experience, and knowledge, and to give their support through word and work, through prayer and action. Local churches, we can help sponsor mission trips that students in their congregation can participate in, and make it possible for at least one of their parents to go along. The shared experience can change their lives and impact the congregation in a positive way upon their return.

Adventist colleges also offer opportunities for their students to dedicate one year of their lives to go as student missionaries someplace in the world. These students take a year off from their studies to serve people they have never met; to live among people of a different language and culture. The college has recognized that a year away from the classroom is not wasted time but rather it is time to grow and learn in a different setting. Of course, parents can't always take an entire year to go with their children, but they can support them through their prayers, through care packages, and may be able to take a few days to visit them and to encourage them.

But one does not have to leave one's own country to go into the mission field. There are people in great need within a short distance from where we live. In places affected by weather-related disasters like tornadoes, earthquakes, hurricanes, or typhoons; families can help by gathering items from their own home, or working together with other families or with the church family. These items can be taken or shipped to communities in need. Almost every day in the news we hear of a house fire and of the people who have lost it all. Young children can learn to share of the abundance of their toys and clothing with those who don't have that much or who have lost all they had.

Another way for families to help those in need is to dedicate time or funds for agencies like the Adventist Community Services or the Adventist Development and Relief Agency. These agencies collect items and funds, and distribute them to people in need both locally and abroad. Simply writing a check is a generous thing to do; but when parents and children participate together in the collection of goods or funds, it becomes a wonderful learning opportunity for all.

In the days when missionaries went to other countries and had practically no contact with home, letters or care packages from their loved ones were always welcomed gifts. Today, technology allows for more regular contact, children and parents can also adopt a missionary with whom they can correspond via e-mail, talk to via Skype, or send care packages in the mail to that person. These are some of the ways to help our children reach out to the world and another way for parents to help mold the lives and characters of their children to be more like Christ.

Reach out to your children spiritually.

Reach out to your children emotionally.

Reach out with your children to those in need.

Reach out with your children to the world.

## ***Conclusion***

Before the age of photography, the only way to preserve the likeness of a person was to commission an artist to create a painting of them. Today we can view many portraits of famous people in museums around the world. A much less expensive way to preserve the likeness of a person became available when photography was invented. This made it possible for more than just the wealthy to have a picture of themselves or their loved ones. Today, with digital photography, almost everyone can make lasting memories of people and places in their lives.

One day everything in this world will be consumed by fire; the expensive paintings of famous people, the photographs of common people, and the digital images of everything and everyone. The only thing that will have eternal lasting value will be the character our children develop while alive. And it is our responsibility and opportunity, as parents, to help our children in the development of their characters. “In dealing with your children, follow the method of the gardener. By gentle touches, by loving ministrations, seek to fashion their characters after the pattern of the character of Christ.” (White, 1954, p.36).

What a great privilege we have, as parents, to be used by God to continue shaping the masterpiece He began when our children were inside their mother’s womb. May we take that artistic task to heart knowing that we’re not simply creating a work of art that will one day pass away, but a true masterpiece for eternity.

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