

Sabbath School Today **With the 1888 Message Dynamic**

Family Seasons **Lesson 5: Wise Words for Families**

You are to “trust in the Lord with all your heart” (Proverbs 3:5). In other words, believe the Lord loves you. Believe you have the blessing that you need even before you realize it.

Why this special series of lessons on “Family Seasons”? The leadership of our church is concerned about the breakdown of families within the church, for it is too much like what is happening in the world. Statistics vary, but everybody knows that roughly half of marriages in the world end in failure, and of those that manage to stick together, many are often miserably unhappy. Satan has gained too much of an advantage, somehow. There is even concern whether marriage can endure.

Society openly endorses couples living together without marriage, and even in the church it is debated whether couples living together without marriage are suitable for baptism into the church. The very question implies that marriage means nothing any more. Must the one true remnant church of Bible prophecy (Rev. 12:17 and 14:12) suffer our levees to collapse and succumb to the rising tide of me-first loveless living?

Nevertheless, we are a most unusual church because we have a divine mandate to prepare a people for meeting Jesus when He returns. That means an experience in receiving and knowing the love (*agape*) of Christ (Eph. 3:19). How can family bonds be strengthened with that love? How can the idea of marriage be honored and glorified? How can husband and wife learn to be happy in love, even into old age? There used to be a popular song, “Silver Threads Among the Gold,” that told of youthful love still strong when hairs were white.

Should our church employ pastors whose marriages have failed and they are divorced? Should our churches elect elders who are divorced? How do we inspire and encourage our youth to enter into marriage with a serious purpose to follow God’s commandments “until death do us part”?

Home is the hardest place to be a Christian! Why? It’s impossible to fool anybody where everybody knows you in and out. But if love (*agape*) prevails, happiness comes with it, and it will be easier for children to grow up as happy Christians. Sometimes, maybe too often, incipient adultery lies buried in the hearts of husband or wife and thus poisons the atmosphere for the children.

Therefore the supreme question we ask is—how can we know and receive the love (*agape*) of Christ into our marriages and homes? Many books address the problem.

Some are helpful. But we begin by recognizing that the Bible is inspired by the Holy Spirit of God, and there we read that the love of Christ (*agape*) is the ultimate answer to these problems (2 Cor. 5:14-19; Eph. 5:25).

We begin with Bible good news: “God sets the *solitary* in families” (Psalm 68:6). In other words, marriage is His plan for “solitary” persons who are lonely (see 1 Corinthians chapter 7 where Paul says that marriage may not be the way of happiness for some special people who are equally loved by the Lord). The word “solitary” has an interesting meaning in Hebrew—to be lonely like an only child. All of us truly belong in that category. Apart from Christ, we were lonely and God did for us what He did for solitary Adam. And friends are part of the Lord’s gift to us all.

What is the best gift parents can give their children? The answer is your marriage to your spouse. It is in the home where children first learn to develop faith, knowledge, and love for God. Many children have a difficult time believing in a God that was not able to keep their parents together and their home intact. “The family circle is the school in which the child receives its first and most enduring lessons.” [1] If you want to give your children the best gift—something that will prepare them for a successful life in this world and for eternity in the earth made new—strengthen your fellowship with your spouse.

This is a prelude to Jesus giving the “solitary” a home in His New Jerusalem forever. Rightly understood, family life in this great antitypical Day of Atonement is a prelude to the social fellowship of meeting Jesus, the holy angels, and all the redeemed and unfallen ones of heaven.

Sabbath-keeping is the special gift of God for family happiness, the one day in the week when we are completely delivered from this terrible addiction of viewing the papers, the magazines, the neighbors, being tempted to covet their possessions. (Such envy ruins our happiness!) Sabbath makes being poor more endurable, and church fellowship to be a joy to lonely people.

Did Jesus enjoy a happy home? He was born into a family where His mother was a stepmother to four (probably difficult) boys whose names we have in Matthew 13:55-58, and there were at least also two stepsisters—all of whom were “older” than He and thus annoyed Him even into their maturity. This happened all during Jesus’ stay at home before the age of 30. Even during his ministry, the older brothers tried to tell Him what to do, with disdain. His being “despised and rejected of men” included that at His earthly home! (cf. John 7:3-5; it was the Jewish custom for older siblings to “boss” the younger ones around).

Imagine what it was like for this *baby* to begin His consciousness by finding Himself in such a home atmosphere! After the early trip to Egypt, stepfather Joseph decided to take Mary and the Baby up to Nazareth to join the half-siblings. Children, if your home is less than perfect, think of Jesus! He endured earthly life in an unhappy home so that you may enjoy life in happy homes!

Think of Jesus' love for His poor mother Mary, through whose soul was plunged that terrible sword that old Simeon had predicted in Luke 2:34, 35. No woman in all of earth's history has borne a heavier burden than she! Think of a mother being forced to watch the Roman soldiers strip her Son naked and sling Him up on a cross and hear those people and the leaders of her church revile Him and condemn Him to hell! This is what it cost her to be the mother of our Savior! A domestic, earthly home was the setting for the life and death of the Son of God! He endured every pain that any of us have had to endure.

Ellen White makes clear that the coming of the 1888 message divinely "sent" to the leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist Church was a fulfillment of God's promise to send us "Elijah before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the Lord" (Mal. 4:4, 5). His primary mission is to bring reconciliation between estranged hearts!

Now, whatever it may cost, let us take up our cross and follow Him all the way we find that He permits to lie before us.

—Paul E. Penno

Endnote:

[1] Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 65.

Notes:

Pastor Paul Penno's video of this lesson is on the Internet at:

<https://youtu.be/qsEBE7P1jmE>

You may subscribe to the e-mail version of *Sabbath School Today* by sending a request to sabbathschooltoday@1888message.org