

2024
RESOURCE
BOOK



Adventist[®]
Family Ministries

I WILL GO WITH MY FAMILY:

UNDERSTANDING DIVERSE FAMILIES

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

PREFACE

In John 17:20-23, the beloved disciple records one of the last prayers of Jesus, that His followers would be known for their love for each other; that their relationship would look like the kind of harmony He shared with His heavenly Father.

“I am praying not only for these disciples but also for all who will ever believe in me through their message. I pray that they will all be one, just as you and I are one—as you are in me, Father, and I am in you. And may they be in us so that the world will believe you sent me. I have given them the glory you gave me, so they may be one as we are one. I am in them and you are in me. May they experience such perfect unity that the world will know that you sent me and that you love them as much as you love me.” (NLT)

In this prayer Jesus directed His attention to future generations of believers. He was praying for us and for believers who will come after us. His main concern in this prayer was for the unity of His followers, established on His unity with His Father (John 10:30, 38; 14:10, 20). In concert with love (John 15:12-13; 17:26), unity is uppermost in the life of believers because it displays the reconciling power of the ministry of Jesus in the world (John 17:21; cf. v. 23).

Remarkably, the great commission is about “making disciples of all nations” (Matt. 28:19); “every nation and tribe and tongue and people” (Rev. 14:6). Yet, the more differences there are among peoples, the higher the probability of misunderstandings and disagreements. Of course—as disciples of Jesus—it is our privilege to represent Him. However, what represents Jesus to the world is our “love for one another” (John 13:34-35). This kind of love is best modeled in family relationships; especially in the kind of family that has decided to live by the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23), rather than engaging in “the works of the flesh” (Gal. 5:19-21).

Given the diversity of families in our congregations—married, single, divorced, widowed, never married, older, younger, with children, without children, disabled, neurodivergent and more—there is a high probability for tension, disaffection, apathy, and alienation. Still, “with God all things are possible” (Matt. 19:26; Mk. 10:27), as we trust Him to help us to “be holy as He is holy” (1 Peter 1:15, 16; Lev. 11:45).

Our prayer is that the 2024 Adventist Family Ministries Resource Book titled *Understanding Diverse Families* will serve as a valuable resource for pastors, Family Ministries leaders, and disciple-makers dedicated to supporting families navigate the chasm of difference with the heart of Jesus. That by so doing, all will be able to answer the prayer of Jesus to be one with each other, and be able to live out the vision of *I Will Go with My Family*.

Maranatha!

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THE *BREAD* EVERY MARRIAGE AND FAMILY NEEDS TODAY

BY WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

THE TEXT:

John 6:24-35 ESV

I. INTRODUCTION

Bread is a staple food prepared from flour dough—usually wheat—and water, commonly baked in an oven. Throughout recorded history around the world, bread has been an essential part of the diet of many cultures. Bread, to be sure, is one of the oldest human-made foods, having been of remarkable significance since the emergence of agriculture, playing an indispensable role in both religious rituals as well as secular culture.

Bread may be leavened by naturally occurring microorganisms, like in sourdough, chemicals like baking soda, industrially produced yeast, or high-pressure ventilation, creating gas bubbles fluffing up bread. In many countries, commercial bread often includes additives to improve flavor, texture, color, shelf life, nutrition, and ease of production.

We are gastronomes. We are commonly referred to as foodies in the United States of America, or food lovers—a more widely used phrase. One of the places where we enjoy eating is at *The Cheesecake Factory*, an American restaurant popular across the United States and also found in

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several countries around the world. We love the bread. You can have as much as you want, especially the brown bread (aka the whole wheat baguette). The bread is so popular—based on a Native American bread recipe—that the chain has begun to sell it in stores.

Over the past century, massive changes have been made to how food is prepared and delivered to people. From drive-thru restaurants to driverless cars, our eating and drinking have been transformed by innovation.

Food delivery began in 1922. Telephone-based food ordering started at a Chinese restaurant in Los Angeles and spread rapidly. Now, food delivery is a \$50 billion business in the United States, involving apps such as Grubhub, Uber Eats, and others. Even supermarkets deliver food now, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic.

Drive-thru restaurants first appeared in 1948, when In-N-Out Burger allowed people to order and pick up food without leaving their cars. Today, up to 70 percent of fast-food sales are drive-thru, and even establishments such as *Starbucks* and *Chipotle* are in on the act.

The McDonald's system was created in 1955, using consistent preparation methods and a dependable supply chain. Now, almost every fast-food restaurant has developed a similar system, with a newcomer called *Just Salad* bragging that its employees can toss a salad every minute.

Molecular gastronomy was developed in 1987 when a microbiologist made ice cream with liquid nitrogen and invented the popular treat *Dippin' Dots*. Similar innovations, such as cooking vacuum-sealed food through a process called *sous vide* (pronounced *sue-veed*), are being done at *Panera*.

Then, *Instagram* appeared in 2010, establishing a new relationship between food and photo-sharing. Now, we don't only eat food; we send and receive pictures of it!

And finally, in 2017, *robots* became the latest innovation in eating. *Chowbotics* is a salad maker, *Cafe X* is a robot barista, and Domino's Pizza has been delivering pizza in certain markets during the past few years via self-driving cars. "Customers grab their order from the back," reports *Fast Company*, "no human interaction necessary." Lidsky, D. (2017, November). Wow!

Today, we are talking about bread and how vital it is to our lives. Nevertheless, we are not talking about just any kind of bread but about Jesus Christ, *The Bread of Life*. Our topic today is titled *The Bread Every Marriage and Family Needs Today*. Let's pray.

II. THE TEXT: JOHN 6:24-35 ESV (JESUS THE BREAD OF LIFE)

²⁴So when the crowd saw that Jesus was not there, nor his disciples, they themselves got into the boats and went to Capernaum, seeking Jesus. ²⁵When they found him on the other side of the sea, they said to him, 'Rabbi, when did you come here?' ²⁶Jesus answered them, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, you are seeking me, not because you saw signs, but because you ate your fill of the loaves. ²⁷Do not work for the food that perishes, but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of

Man will give to you. For on him God the Father has set his seal.’²⁸ Then they said to him, ‘What must we do, to be doing the works of God?’²⁹ Jesus answered them, ‘This is the work of God, that you believe in him whom he has sent.’³⁰ So they said to him, ‘Then what sign do you do, that we may see, and believe you? What work do you perform?’³¹ Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness; as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat.’³² Jesus then said to them, ‘Truly, truly, I say to you, it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven.’³³ For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven and gives life to the world.’³⁴ They said to him, ‘Sir, give us this bread always.’³⁵ Jesus said to them, ‘I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger and whoever believes in me shall never thirst.’”

III. EXPLICATION AND APPLICATION

MIRACLE WORKER

Jesus was a true innovator in the world of eating, but he always had a human touch. In all four gospels (Matt. 14:13-21; Mark 6:30-44; Luke 9:10-17; John 6:1-14), Jesus feeds 5,000 men (and perhaps an equal number of women and more children; so probably about 20,000 people) by the Sea of Galilee. With just five barley loaves and two little fish, he creates a meal in which everyone gets as much as they want, and all are satisfied.

That’s not molecular gastronomy -- that’s *miraculous* gastronomy!

TEMPORAL FOOD VS. ETERNAL FOOD

Then, in the Gospel of John, Jesus warns the crowd not to focus too much on the bread he has just given them. “Do not work for the food that perishes,” He says, “but for the food that endures to eternal life, which the Son of Man will give to you...” (John 6:27). The people are curious about this “food that endures to eternal life,” wondering what in the world Jesus is talking about. Is he speaking about easy-to-store, vacuum-sealed food cooked with the *sous vide* process?

Not exactly.

The people of Galilee have already experienced innovations in eating. Not drive-thru restaurants or food prepared by the McDonald’s system, but miraculous bread that comes from heaven. “Our fathers ate the manna in the wilderness;” they say, “as it is written, ‘He gave them bread from heaven to eat’” (John 6:31).

Jesus knows all about this manna-style bread but wants to introduce something new. “Truly, truly, I say to you,” says Jesus, “it was not Moses who gave you the bread from heaven, but my Father gives you the true bread from heaven” (John 6:32). Bread from heaven—the manna received in the passage from Egypt to Canaan—is great, he seems to be saying, but not as awesome as the “true bread from heaven.” An even more significant innovation is coming and is now here to

transform the hearts of every husband and every wife, to transform every home and every person in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, regardless of your status: single—never married, divorced, widowed—married, old, middle-aged, or young. The True Bread from Heaven is available to everyone who will have it.

“For the bread of God is he who comes down from heaven,” Jesus announces, “and gives life to the world” (John 6:33). He is talking about heavenly bread that doesn’t simply fill the stomach but satisfies the soul, transforms husbands and wives; changes fathers and mothers and children and people of every country, culture, language, and tribe, and “gives life to the world.” Indeed, he gives life to the world of every family, including your family, if you will allow Him into your lives. You won’t find that one on the menu at *The Cheesecake Factory* or at one of your favorite restaurants. This one you must seek with all your heart. As declared by the prophet Jeremiah: “You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart” (Jeremiah 29:13).

Not surprisingly, the people respond by saying, “Sir, give us this bread always” (John 6:34).

LIFE GIVING BREAD

We can understand their hunger while wondering whether they really know what they are asking for. What exactly *is* this bread of God that gives life to the world? It’s not a loaf that has been shot with a blast of liquid nitrogen. It’s not a type of bread kneaded by a robot or delivered by a driverless car. It is not the kind of bread you can find at the supermarket or by the side of the road. This Bread is the kind you must daily and intentionally seek, as Ellen White counsels in *Steps to Christ*, p. 70: “Consecrate yourself to God in the morning; make this your very first work.” White, E. G. (1892).

No, this bread of God is nothing less than Jesus himself. “I am the bread of life;” says Jesus. “whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst” (John 6:35).

The greatest of all innovations in eating is the appearance of Jesus as the “bread of life.” For the first time, the people Jesus speaks with can receive “the true bread from heaven,” which gives life to the world and satisfies their souls’ deepest hunger and thirst. We, too, can receive “the true bread from heaven” to change the realities in our families by helping us manage differences of opinions and bad attitudes, forgive past slights and hurts, and make the wrongs right again.

So, what does it mean for Jesus to give life to the world or life to your marriage and family relationships? Glad you asked!

The answer to this question is both universal and very personal, and both levels are equally important. After all, bread is a universal food, available almost everywhere around the world. It is also very personal in the sense that it appears in many different forms in a variety of cultures: when we visited Russia for the first time—many years ago—we had freshly baked braided bread in our apartment at the Euro-Asia Division Headquarters of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Moscow, where we stayed during our visit. This is a common welcoming gesture in that country. The aroma of this special bread filled the room and conveyed a welcoming spirit. Then there’s nan bread we’ve enjoyed many times in India; chapati in East Africa; pita bread in Egypt, Israel, Jordan,

Lebanon, Oman, Qatar, the UAE, and other parts of the Middle East; baguette in France; tortillas in Mexico; and coco bread in Jamaica. And Jesus is much more than these.

On a universal level, Jesus is the Word of God in human form. As God's Word, "He was in the beginning with God." John tells us, "All things were made through him, and without him was not anything made that was made. In him was life, and the life was the light of men [the Greek word for men is *Anthropos*; humankind/everyone]" (John 1:2-4).

HE MADE ALL THINGS AND HOLDS ALL THINGS

Whether considering the Big Bang theory or the creation story of Genesis chapters 1 and 2, it is important to realize that Jesus was there. Everything has come into being through him, including life, marriage, and family. The apostle Paul says much the same thing in his letter to the Colossians when he describes Jesus as the firstborn of all creation. "For by him all things were created, in heaven and on earth," says Paul. "and in him all things hold together" (Colossians 1:16-17).

Jesus was in the beginning with God. In him, all things hold together. This is the universal Jesus, the eternal bread that gives life to the world. The eternal Father that can keep marriages and families together, regardless of how different from each other we might be. Interestingly, we believe we have so much in common before getting married. After marriage, though, we tend to wonder how we got together since we are as different as different. Life can be strange sometimes because we choose to live by our feelings rather than by the principle of love, which is "patient and kind; not envious or boastful; not arrogant or rude; does not insist on its own way; is not irritable or resentful; does not rejoice at wrongdoing but rejoices with the truth. Bears all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends..." (1 Cor. 13:4-8).

Someone once said that before marriage, opposites attract. But after marriage, opposites tend to repel. Yet, we are here to tell you that Jesus, the bread from heaven, can bring peace and harmony to every individual, every marriage, and every home, even yours. If you hear His voice and open the door, He will come in and eat with you, your spouse and family, and you with Him (Revelation 3:20).

THE PERSONAL BREAD

But maybe this cosmic Christ is too big for us to swallow in one piece. It is hard to take a bite out of a loaf this large. So, it's better to drop to a much more personal level, focusing on Jesus as the bread of life for each of us. Perhaps that's why he was born in the little town of Bethlehem, which means *house of bread*.

As our personal bread, Jesus gives us strength to face the challenges of personal life, of life in our marriage and family relationships—both minor irritations and huge obstacles. Everyone knows what it feels like to be "hangry"—that is, bad-tempered or irritable because of being hungry. A little snack can lift your spirits and give you the strength you need to move ahead. Long-distance runners know they cannot complete an entire marathon with the fuel they have in their stomachs from breakfast. They must eat along the way, fueling their muscles with gel packs, power bars, and other carbohydrates. So, we need to snack on Jesus all day long by prayer, Bible reading, and practicing

acknowledging His presence in our lives every day—all day. He can soothe our anxieties, calm our fears, and give us strength to forgive and ask for forgiveness. His presence can give us patience and kindness when we need them most. Jesus must become our personal bread.

As the bread of life, Jesus gives us the help we need to be gentle and forgiving in our marriage and family relationships. He is the Word of God in human form, offering us correction, guidance, and forgiveness. He is the bread of life in human form, giving us nourishment, strength, inspiration, and kindness. Without this living bread, we would quickly wear out and give up in the face of the many challenges in personal life, as well as in marriage and family life. Jesus is the One who is with us and available to us, able to satisfy and fix our hunger and our thirst, our lack of patience and anger. Paul reminds us to seek the bread of life when he says: “Finally, be strong in the Lord and in the strength of his might. Put on the whole armor of God, that you may be able to stand against the schemes of the devil” (Ephesians 6:10, 11).

In this context, Ellen White shares in *The Adventist Home*, pp. 108-109:

“God tests and proves us by the common occurrences of life. It is the little things which reveal the chapters of the heart. It is the little attentions, the numerous small incidents and simple courtesies of life, that make up the sum of life’s happiness; and it is the neglect of kindly, encouraging, affectionate words, and the little courtesies of life, which helps compose the sum of life’s wretchedness. It will be found at last that the denial of self for the good and happiness of those around us constitutes a large share of the life record in heaven. And the fact will also be revealed that the care of self, irrespective of the good and happiness of others, is not beneath the notice of our heavenly Father.” White, E. G. (1952).

THE DAILY BREAD

It is no surprise, then, that this meal, this Bread of Life, needs to be offered regularly in our homes because we all need the nourishment that comes from the presence and influence of the Bread Jesus Christ.

On this note, Ellen White offers in *Child Guidance*, p. 520:

“In every family there should be a fixed time for morning and evening worship. How appropriate it is for parents to gather their children about them before the fast is broken, to thank the heavenly Father for His protection during the night, and...when evening comes, to gather once more before Him and thank Him for the blessings of the day past.” White, E. G. (1954).

Jesus knew we would need the bread of life not just once but repeatedly, especially as we deal with the daily challenges of marriage and family differences. That’s why Jesus said, “Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on

the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock” (Matthew 7:24, 25). So, to partake of the bread of life is to build on the Words of Jesus, to build on His teachings, to build on His values, to build on His love.

THE INNOVATIVE BREAD

To be sure, Jesus is God’s greatest innovation, the one sent into the world “that whoever believes in him should not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16). When we believe in him and eat the Bread of Life by reading His Word in our families every day, we receive the forgiveness and inspiration we need to face the many challenges that will inevitably emerge in our marriage and family relationships. Nourished by “the food that endures to eternal life” (John 6:27), we can be Christ’s people in the world, and point others to the peace, justice, humility, patience, kindness, and salvation of the kingdom of heaven in our marriage and family relationships despite the differences among us. In this vein, Paul reminds us: “Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus” (Philippians 4:6, 7).

Over the centuries, there have been many innovations in eating, from food delivery to salad-making robots. But all this earthly food eventually spoils; it is “the food that perishes” (John 6:27). As good as it is, even cornbread spoils. In fact—even manna—as miraculous as it was, spoiled after a day. None of it endures for eternal life. Only by believing in Jesus and doing His will in our marriage and family relationships each day, through love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22, 23), can we receive the bread of God which gives us and the world life, both personally and universally, especially in our marriage and family relationships.

IV. CONCLUSION

All of us have opened the refrigerator many times to grab a snack and said to ourselves, “I’m hungry, but don’t know what I want to eat?” Truth be told, many of us have been snacking on junk food for far too long. It is time to get serious about consuming and enjoying nutritious, growth-producing, life-transforming food. Today, we need to join the crowd around Jesus in saying, “Sir, give us this bread always” (John 6:34). It is a request we can make without needing a smartphone or an app. It is a request we need to make every day, every hour, in fact, every minute.

For our deepest hunger—to be sure—is for the authentic living bread, Jesus Christ himself. He needs to be our choice in our marriage and family relationships today and every day. As the apostle Paul declares, “...walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh. For the desires of the flesh are against the Spirit, and the desires of the Spirit are against the flesh, for these are opposed to each other, to keep you from doing the things you want to do” (Galatians 5:16, 17).

As we choose to partake of the Bread of Life today, the Bread Jesus Christ, may God bless your marriage and family today—despite your differences—as you recognize and embrace the truth that Jesus is the bread every marriage and family needs today.

God bless you.

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PRAYING FOR YOUR FAMILY

BY PAVEL GOIA

THE TEXT

1 Sam. 12:23

PURPOSE

This sermon shows the process of praying for our family members in the example of Hannah, Samuel's mother.

INTRODUCTION

Most of us know that prayer is essential, especially when petitioning God on their behalf. But have you ever thought about this: It is not only a vital duty to pray for your family, it is a sin against God not to pray for them.

[NOTE: PLEASE INSERT YOUR OWN ILLUSTRATION HERE OR REFERENCE THE AUTHOR IN YOUR SERMON].

My wife, Daniela, and I are blessed with two wonderful boys: Gabriel (Gabe) and Ovidiu (Ovi). They are good-looking, like their mother, hardworking; they love Jesus, and they love us. They call and talk to us daily. They pray and study the Word, get involved in the church, and so on.

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However, that was not always the case for one son. Our older boy, Gabe, decided he didn't want or need God anymore when he was about 17 years old. He just wanted to have fun and determined that church spoiled his fun. So, he no longer wanted to attend church, pray, or study the Bible. In fact, he said, "Leave me alone with your religious stuff. It is for old people; when I retire, I will come back to church."

We educated them and raised them in love for God and the Word. And they had free will to make their own choices. Friends have such a powerful influence over children. Good friends can pull them up, while bad friends can push them down. Our son made friends that, let's just say, were not the best influence on him. He stopped going to church, started to get bad grades in school, decided to speed, and, consequently, got speeding tickets and was involved in car accidents. The list goes on.

My wife and I prayed for them both faithfully. Daniela even fasted every Wednesday. I fasted every single day, but never more than five hours consecutively!

TWISTING GOD'S ARM

How long should we pray? You see, if you pray "petition" prayers, if you ask God for temporary things like a bigger house, a nicer car, a higher-paying job, an ivy-league school, better health—things related to this life—what you are doing is trying to impose your will on God. Instead of twisting God's arm to do what you ask, be like Jesus in the garden, and say, "May Your will be done," and then accept God's will and trust in His love, wisdom, and promises. Wait for His answer in His time. The Bible promise in Isaiah 40:31 refers to those who "WAIT on the Lord."

But if you pray "intercessory" prayers and plead to God on behalf of someone else's salvation for eternal things, keep praying and never stop. We cannot take anything to heaven except the people we work and pray for. God gave us freedom of choice, and He respects our choice. When we pray for someone who doesn't desire a relationship with God or has rejected God, our prayers give God opportunities to work on their heart where He is not yet invited.

BACK TO THE STORY

My wife and I earnestly prayed for Gabe. We prayed every single day; we labored in prayer. We decided not to let God go before He did something about our son. We wanted to know what God wanted us to do; we didn't want to push Gabe too far, nor did we want to do nothing. We even asked God to do whatever it took to save our son; what's the benefit of having things yet having him lose eternal life?

It took more than two years of fervent, determined prayer, a time when the situation didn't seem to get better. In fact, at times, it seemed to get worse. We could not afford to get discouraged and stop praying. We said, "We will pray as long as we live."

Our son started to have all types of incidents.

One Sabbath, while waterskiing with his friends, he had an accident. While showing off, he jumped up in the air, trying to roll over, and dropped the rope the boat was pulling him with. The

handle bounced up and hit him in the back of the head. There was blood all over. The doctor said that he would have died if the handle had hit him one more inch towards the middle of his head. He called us and said he would change his life. He didn't.

Another time, he was driving home from college for Christmas vacation. It was snowing; he was speeding and fell asleep while driving. When he opened his eyes, he was just about to careen into a concrete pillar. He yanked the wheel, spun the car, flew off the road, over an embankment, and down into a swamp covered with weeds. The vehicle slowly sank into the water, and the weeds surrounded and partially covered the car.

He tried to open the door with no success. The windows didn't work either. The car had no power, lights, horn, or anything—he was stuck inside. The water started slowly filling the car. He started to pray and made God all types of promises. Instantly, the power came back on, and he lowered the window and escaped the sinking vehicle.

He promised to change. . . but he didn't. In fact, after he thought about it, he tried to explain away the miracle of the car's power being restored and vehemently asked us to stop praying for him, implying that we and our prayers were the cause of his accidents.

We kept praying.

Months later, on a Sabbath, Gabe went with his friends four-wheeling on all-terrain vehicles (ATV). Some of them tried to go up a mountain, but it was too steep, so they decided to go around. He wanted to show off, so he gunned the ATV and charged up the steep incline. He didn't get far before the ATV flipped upside down and trapped the right side of his head between it and a rock. The helmet was shattered, pieces of his skull were scattered over the rock, splinters of bone were lodged in his right eye, etc.

His friends rushed Gabe to the hospital. The doctor called us and said that the damage was bad and that our son probably didn't have much time to live. We drove the 11-hour trip in 9.5 hours. We prayed all the way. In the beginning, we prayed for God to save his life. Eventually, I was impressed to pray for his salvation. I knew that God heard our prayers, and He would ultimately make the decision. We needed to say, "Your will be done," and mean it. As parents, those were very difficult words for us to say to God. But we decided to surrender our son's life into God's hands.

Soon after that decision, we got there and waited. The doctor came and informed us that they saw no brain injury—he would make it! They later tested his eye, and the optical nerve was not touched—he would have normal vision. Gabe had plastic surgery; 5 titanium plates were put on the right side of his head to replace the missing bone.

When he woke up, his head was in bandages, except for the right side and right eye.

"Dad, am I dead, or will I die?" he asked me.

"Son, dead people don't talk, you are ok, and you will make it."

"Will I be paralyzed?"

"Unfortunately, no," I said.

"Why unfortunately?"

“Because you will still be able to do stupid stuff.”

“Do I have brain injuries?”

“That would be impossible,” I replied.

“Why?” he questioned.

“You cannot have brain injuries because you don’t have a brain. What was in your head to go up that mountain?”

“Hee, hee, hee. Please don’t make me laugh; it hurts. Dad, God saved my life again.”

“Yes, son, He did. He has been trying hard to get your attention and wake you up.”

“Dad, I want to change, but I have no power.”

“Son, who told you that you have the power to change yourself? Only God can change you. Invite God’s presence daily and continually into your life. ‘Whoever calls the name of the LORD shall be saved’ ” [Rom. 10:13]. It will be a life-long process, but as long as His presence is IN you, working with you, you are safe. Only when you separate from Him and Satan attacks you, can you not have victory. Start today, and then every day.”

We prayed together. He prayed a very simple, short prayer. From that day on, he started to daily spend quality time in communion with God to invite God into his life.

His life has changed completely. His surgery was extremely successful, with no marks. You cannot even see that he had an accident. We could not have dreamed for better. He loves God and loves us, loves his wife and daughters, works hard, gets involved in the church, and so on.

But it took a lot of persevering prayer.

HOW DO YOU DO IT?

How do you pray for your family? Should you ever stop? It is never too late to start, and it is our duty to always pray to ask God for His Spirit in our families and His presence.

In the Bible, we have many examples of prayer. One of them is in First Samuel chapter 1. The story takes place in the early eleventh century B.C. In this story, let’s highlight the most important points related to prayer for our families.

Elkanah had two wives. Although God created one man and one woman to be together, and the Bible clearly underlines that anything outside that is sin, in time, after many generations, Israel slowly started to copy the habits of the nations around them. At that time, if you had children, people thought you were blessed by God. And if you had no children, you were considered cursed. Hannah had no children. The other wife, Peninnah, continually ridiculed, mocked, and made Hannah’s life miserable. Hannah had no joy and no peace. Her everyday life was filled with heartache.

Hannah had been praying for a while for a child, but with no results. At that time, the temple in Jerusalem was not yet built, so Elkanah and his family would travel to Shiloh once a year for Yom-Kippur, the Day of Atonement. While others were eating, Hannah was so miserable and overwhelmed that she didn't eat but went to the Tabernacle to pray.

A WOMAN OF PRAYER

“She was in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the LORD, and wept in anguish” (1 Sam. 1:10). Hannah longed for a child. She had been praying. We don't know how many years she had been praying, but we do know from verse 8 that it was years. Yet verse 10 says she *continued* to pray before the Lord. The word used for “continued” is *Rabah*, meaning many, abundant, excessively, and numerous.

We can certainly conclude that Hannah didn't just pray routinely or only in crisis, but that prayer was a lifestyle for her. People who pray a lot focus more and more on God. The more you pray, the more you focus on God. The more you focus on God, the less you think of yourself, so the more you surrender to God. Your relationship with God builds stronger and stronger.

SHE FOCUSED ON GOD

Hannah's relationship with God, including her prayers, started changing the more she prayed.

She went from asking God for something—a child—to committing the child to the Lord. She said in First Samuel 1:11, “O LORD of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life.” She focused on God and His service, not herself and her needs. She surrendered her greatest longing to God.

SHE IS MEEK

The next part of Hannah's story provides an insight into how prayer changes people and how it is a process.

“And it happened, as she continued praying before the LORD, that Eli watched her mouth” (v. 12). As she was pouring her heart before God, Eli, the high priest, is watching her. “Now Hannah spoke in her heart; only her lips moved, but her voice was not heard. Therefore Eli thought she was drunk. So Eli said to her, ‘How long will you be drunk? Put your wine away from you!’ ” (vv. 13, 14). This is very interesting. She was in anguish and suffering and would expect comfort and support especially from the pastor. Yet she is misinterpreted and judged, although she's innocent.

Did she get angry and allow herself to feel hurt and offended? No! In fact, with humility and kindness and in a calm voice, she says, “ ‘No, my lord, I *am* a woman of sorrowful spirit. I have drunk neither wine nor intoxicating drink, but have poured out my soul before the LORD. Do not consider your maidservant a wicked woman, for out of the abundance of my complaint and grief I

have spoken until now” (vv. 15, 16). She showed meekness, patience, and kindness. People who are in continual communication with and focus on God no longer take offense easily, judge, condemn, or criticize others; they don’t feel the need for revenge. They don’t think of themselves, as their eyes are on God.

SHE KNOWS GOD’S VOICE

People who pray a lot and spend time in God’s presence also get used to God’s voice and learn to distinguish it from other voices. “Then Eli answered and said, ‘Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition which you have asked of Him.’ And she said, ‘Let your maidservant find favor in your sight.’ So, the woman went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad.” (vv. 17, 18).

Unbelievable! She had **no proof** whatsoever that God had answered her prayer. They had tried for many years, again and again, to have a child. She probably started a natural food diet. They went to the best doctors, prayed, and did anything they could do, with no results. And now, the pastor says, “May God answer your petition,” and she recognizes God’s voice.

SHE HAS STRONG FAITH

“Then she went her way and ate, and her face was no longer sad” (v. 18). Amazing, instantly Hannah goes back with joy, eats, and rejoices. Rejoices based on what? Faith. No proof, no evidence, just pure blind faith.

We see here that not only is she a woman of prayer, but she is also a woman of faith. Nothing has happened yet, and there is no human possibility for a child, no proof, yet she believes strongly that God has already answered her prayer, and she gets up and eats, although she refused to eat before, and is no longer sad. People who pray a lot get to know God, and the more they know God, the more they trust in Him, they have faith.

SHE HAS JOY AND PEACE

Verse 18 says that Hannah was no longer sad. People who pray know God, focus on Him and trust in Him. Those who put their trust in God have peace and joy. Isaiah 26:3 says, “You will keep *him* in perfect peace, *Whose* mind *is* stayed on You, Because he trusts in You.” She had peace and joy, not based on circumstances but on Her close relationship with God and her trust and faith in Him.

SHE HAS PATIENCE

“So it came to pass in the process of time that Hannah conceived and bore a son, and called his name Samuel, *saying*, ‘Because I have asked for him from the LORD’ ” (v. 20). People who pray much develop patience. Hannah didn’t get pregnant right away; we don’t know how long it took, yet she patiently waited in faith and joy. She knew God and had peace and joy as if God had already given her a son—like it was a done deal, past tense. She is now praising God for his answer, just patiently waiting for the delivery of the answer. To rejoice before you see it as you have already received it.

[NOTE: PLEASE INSERT YOUR OWN ILLUSTRATION HERE OR REFERENCE THE AUTHOR IN YOUR SERMON].

When my son, Ovi, was young, he really wanted a tricycle. And not just any trike; he would tell anyone who would listen that he wanted a blue tricycle with three wheels and peddles. One day, he came up to me and asked me, for what seemed like the hundredth time, if I could buy him a blue trike with three wheels and peddles. His mother and I had discussed it and decided it was time. So, I told him, “Tomorrow after work, I will go buy your tricycle.”

He was so excited! He jumped up and down and then ran around the whole neighborhood, telling his friends, “I have a trike! It’s blue, with three wheels and peddles!”

His friends said, “Wow, where is it?”

“It’s coming tomorrow at 5 p.m.”

Ovi had spent so much time with me and knew me so well that he trusted me, his father, and believed I would keep my promise to him. Therefore, he was confident and talking like he already had the tricycle.

Hannah didn’t need to see God’s answer to believe. She had spent so much time with God that she knew and trusted Him. God set into motion a miracle, and she conceived. Imagine her faith paying off! She prayed for the baby before she was pregnant, during pregnancy, and after he was born. She was always praying.

That’s what we should also do: always pray for our families. Commentator Matthew Henry stated, “It is the duty of the parents to pray for their children and the great thing we should desire is, that they may be kept in covenant with Him, and may have grace to walk before him in uprightness.” Henry, M. (1834).

We don’t have a lot of time to pray and work for our children and families, so we should use that time wisely. And even if we have not prayed much up to this point, it is never too late to start praying diligently for them!

COMPLETE SURRENDER

Hannah vowed before the Lord that the child would be given to Him. “Now when she had weaned him, she took him up with her, with three bulls, one ephah of flour, and a skin of wine, and brought him to the house of the LORD in Shiloh. And the child *was* young” (v. 24).

Samuel was about six years old. It is heartbreaking for a parent, moreover a mother, to be separated from their child so early. We have cell phones now, but Hannah didn’t. She would only see him once a year.

First Samuel 1 verses 25 through 27 say, “Then they slaughtered a bull, and brought the child to Eli. And she said, ‘O my lord! As your soul lives, my lord, I *am* the woman who stood by you here, praying to the LORD. For this child I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition which I asked of Him.’ ”

You would think that maybe Hannah would be so sad to leave her only son that she would cry in a corner and pray something like, “Lord, give me strength, help me, it is not easy to let go of my son...”

We should also look at the context in which the child was to live. Eli’s two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were absolutely corrupt (1 Sam. 2:12, 17). The Bible says that all Israel knew about them. So, Hannah had many reasons to be concerned and not leave Samuel there. But she made a covenant and knew God enough to trust Him. In fact, she trusted in God more than in herself. She knew that God would do a better job than she would. Notice how she prays, “And Hannah prayed and said: ‘My heart rejoices in the LORD; My horn is exalted in the LORD. I smile at my enemies, because I rejoice in Your salvation’ ” (1 Sam. 2:1).

She didn’t focus on herself or the child. She didn’t say, “Oh Lord, it is going to be really hard for me. . . and the influence around little Samuel will be so bad. . .” She surrendered Samuel into the service of Eli and fulfilled her promise to God.

It is our duty to daily surrender our families to God. Whatever we keep, we lose. We don’t have the power to preserve and protect. Whatever we surrender and give to God is what we save. Only He can protect, preserve, and bless. To give your family to Him is the best thing for them.

NEVER STOP PRAYING

But she never stopped praying. First Samuel 2 verses 18 and 19 say, “But Samuel ministered before the LORD, *even as* a child, wearing a linen ephod. Moreover, his mother used to make him a little robe and bring *it* to him year by year when she came up with her husband to offer the yearly sacrifice.” What did Samuel have as a constant reminder that his mother never stopped praying for him? She made a coat that he would cover himself with when he would go to serve and pray. The message was clear, “Samuel, you are covered with prayer.”

Author Ellen White stated, “From the earliest dawn of intellect she [Hannah] had taught her son to love and reverence God and to regard himself as the Lord’s. By every familiar object surrounding him she had sought to lead his thoughts up to the Creator. When separated from her child, the faithful mother’s solicitude did not cease. Every day he was the subject of her prayers. Every year she made, with her own hands, a robe of service for him; and as she went up with her husband to worship at Shiloh, she gave the child this reminder of her love. Every fiber of the little garment had been woven with a prayer that he might be pure, noble, and true. She did not ask for her son worldly greatness, but she earnestly pleaded that he might attain that greatness which Heaven values—that he might honor God and bless his fellow men.” White, E. G. (1890).

She didn’t say, “Lord be with me and my son,” or, “Lord, bless him and help him to get a good education and a good job.” She prayed that he would love and serve God, not that he would be blessed but that he would be a blessing to others.

She had been praying constantly for him, and she continued to pray. She never stopped. Prayer for our families is a duty, a blessing, and a privilege. God calls us to pray daily for our

families. To ask for His protection and presence daily, for His Spirit to fill them and lead them, to cover them in prayer.

Will you be a Hannah? Will you be in constant communication with the Lord, pleading for His will to be done in the lives of your children and your family members?

“If the Savior of men, with His divine strength, felt the need of prayer, how much more should we feeble, sinful mortals feel the necessity of prayer—fervent, constant prayer. . . . He committed Himself to God and, through earnest prayer and perfect submission to the will of His Father, came off conqueror. Those who profess the truth for these last days, above every other class of professed Christians, should imitate the great Exemplar in prayer.” White, E. G. (1938).

We are living in the last days of this earth’s history. We must grow our relationship with God by constantly connecting with Him, just like Jesus did. Prayer is a process! Less than 10 percent of prayers answered in the Bible were answered instantly. Keep your family before the altar daily and leave them in God’s hands joyfully.

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- Henry, M. (1834). *Matthew Henry’s Concise Bible Commentary*. Fessenden and Company.
- White, E. G. (1890). *Patriarchs and Prophets*. Review and Herald Publishing Association.
- White, E. G. (1938). *Counsels on Diet and Foods*. Review and Herald Publishing Association.

CHILDREN'S STORIES

— Use *Children's Stories* for the special family Sabbaths. Please feel free to use props and materials that are easily available to you. The objective is to engage the children in your church family.

HAPPY BIRTHDAY EVERYONE!

BY ELAINE OLIVER

TEXT

Psalm 139:14

PROPS

Happy Birthday banner, birthday hat, birthday blowers, or anything available. Before story time begins, assign two older children or adults to hold up the birthday banner. Put on a birthday hat and blow blower as you start story time if acceptable.

STORY

(Begin the story by saying), “HAPPY BIRTHDAY!”

I know something exciting! Somebody has a birthday today! *(If someone or several children respond, acknowledge them, and wish them a happy birthday by name).* How did I know that someone had a birthday? Because someone, somewhere in the world, has a birthday today, and someone will have one tomorrow and the next day and the next day!”

(Of course, by now, the children will usually be engaged and volunteer unsolicited responses such as, “My baby brother has a birthday today, or my grandma has a birthday next week.” Try to engage the children a little without allowing any one child to monopolize the conversation. Allow several children to

participate while controlling the story. You can respond by saying, "That's wonderful, how exciting, wow, next week!" Then, move on to your following sentence without stopping to have an entire dialogue with one child).

You've guessed it! Everybody has a birthday, whether you're small, tall, young, or old. Most people think their birthday is extraordinary and we usually celebrate with cake and sometimes balloons. Your birthday is important (*point out to the children*); my birthday is important. Our birthday is important because it celebrates the day we were born. It is the day of your birth! That's why we say birthday!

The Bible tells us in Psalms that we are fearfully and wonderfully made. Do you know what that means? It means that God, the Creator of the Universe, also made us. We were created by God and for a specific purpose. Every one of us is special to God. There is no one else on the entire earth who is just like you! You are precious to God! There isn't anyone like you that was born before, or that will be born after you. Sometimes, you may see someone who looks like you or that you look like, maybe your mother or father, sister or brother or aunt or uncle, or perhaps someone you've never seen before. But no one is exactly like you. You are uniquely designed by God, which makes you very special.

And just as you are very special, so are all the people around you that God created. Look around you and see all the special people God created. It doesn't matter if they don't look like you, talk like you, or even act like you. They are made special by God too. Sometimes, when you see someone with straight hair, curly hair, light skin, dark skin, skinny, chubby, in a wheelchair, or wearing glasses, you may think they look different than you. And guess what? They may think you look different than they do. But then you remember that we are uniquely designed by God, and all are very special to God. God celebrated our birthday because we were all created in His image. And because we were created in the image of God, we want to be more like Jesus every day. How do we do this? By treating one another with kindness and respect. We can look at one another and say, "Happy Birthday." God created you, so you are special! *Encourage the children to tell one another: Happy birthday, you are special!*

PRAYER

Dear Jesus, thank you for making each of us special. Help us know that just as you made me special, you also made others special. Teach us to love one another as you love and celebrate our birthday. In Jesus' name, we pray. Amen.

LESSONS FROM THE BOTTOM OF THE SEA

BY DAWN JACOBSON-VENN

THE TEXT

Ecclesiastes 4:9-10, Proverbs 27:17

PROPS

Pictures of the Pistol Shrimp and Goby Fish

What is the best thing about having a friend? (Let children respond). Good friends are helpful. Sometimes friends are good at something we are not good at, so together we make a great team!

TODAY, I want to tell you about an unusual but extraordinary friendship between the Pistol Shrimp and a Goby fish. Look at this little guy (show a picture of a Pistol Shrimp).

Being called a shrimp is not usually considered a compliment, and being teased for being small is no fun. The Pistol Shrimp is tiny, about the size of your finger. Many would say that this little sea creature does not matter much.

But God made the Pistol Shrimp with many possibilities, including a mighty weapon built right into their one oversized snapper claw. This claw can grow to be half the size of its tiny body. The Pistol Shrimp communicates by snapping his claw. Not only that, he also shoots bubbles by snapping his claw, which makes a big, massive bang that is louder than a firecracker! Besides giant whales like the Sperm Whale and the Beluga Whale, this tiny Pistol Shrimp is one of the loudest creatures in the sea!

Those tiny bubbles that the Pistol Shrimp shoots are also very hot. What's the hottest thing you can think of? (Let children respond) The Pistol Shrimp shoots bubbles up to four times hotter than lava! Lava is over 4,000–degrees Celsius or more than 8,000 degrees Fahrenheit. Almost as HOT as the SUN!!!!

As impressive as that is, these tiny shrimps are also very vulnerable to predators because of their poor eyesight. They are nearly blind!

Now look at this Goby fish (Show a picture of the Goby fish). If the Pistol Shrimp snaps its giant claw together so tightly that a jet of water shoots out like a bullet, why would the cute little Goby fish willingly go near them? Because God created us to work together! We can see the potential of others and see our differences as possibilities!

Through the partnership with the Goby fish, who, it turns out, has excellent eyesight, they can thrive! The Goby fish uses its good eyes to help the Pistol Shrimp. But the Goby fish, who has good eyes, can't dig a hole to hide from its enemies or make its home at the bottom of the sea.

So, the Pistol Shrimp and Goby fish team up (show a picture of them together). The Gobies act as seeing-eye fish for the shrimp by keeping their tail fins in contact with the shrimp's antennae. So, whenever they are outside their burrow, the fish can quickly signal when danger is near. In return, the Gobies get free access to the Pistol Shrimps' burrows so that they can both hide from predators. The Pistol Shrimp digs and cares for these tunnel houses that they share! The Goby fish is a watchman and shares its' good eyesight with the Pistol Shrimp! Isn't God amazing?

We can see in this example from the bottom of the ocean how we are all uniquely created by God and that God designed us to help one another because each of us is gifted, needed, and treasured! The Pistol Shrimp and Goby Fish make a great team! Instead of looking at each other's weaknesses, they focus on the possibilities! We have a creator God who sees the possibilities in us. Let's ask God to help us do the same with others!

Close with prayer

NOTES

Learn more Search for Pistol Shrimp and Goby fish pictures at <https://commons.wikimedia.org/>

Learn more about the Pistol Shrimp's claw https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Pistol_shrimp_claw_mechanism.svg

SEMINARS

— *Seminars* are designed to be used during Christian Home and Marriage Week. Please read the seminars thoroughly to get familiar with the content and technical terms. To download a PowerPoint® presentation file visit: family.adventist.org/2024RB

A CHURCH COMMUNITY'S ROLE IN SUPPORTING FAMILIES OF NEURODIVERGENT CHILDREN

BY WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

THE TEXTS

Jeremiah 1:5

Psalm 139: 13, 14

Matthew 25:34-36

Matthew 25:40

“Then He will also say to those on the left hand, Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.’ Then they also will answer Him, saying, ‘Lord, when did we see You hungry or thirsty or a stranger or naked or sick or in prison, and did not minister to You? Then He will answer them, saying, ‘Assuredly, I say to you, inasmuch as

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you did not do it to one of the least of these, you did not do it to Me.' And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life." Matthew 25:41-46 NKJV

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND DESIRED OUTCOMES

This seminar explores the multifaceted ways in which church communities can provide comprehensive support to parents of neurodivergent children, encompassing ADHD, Autism Spectrum Disorders (ASD), and various behavioral disorders. We examine the potential benefits of a nurturing spiritual environment and consider practical strategies for creating inclusive spaces. We hope to encourage the importance of education, awareness, acceptance, and accommodation in fostering a supportive church community. Each participant should walk away committed to being a committee of one in ensuring that families with neurodivergent children feel supported and feel welcome in the church community.

Note for presenter: To humanize the experience, we recommend that prior to presenting this seminar, the presenter have a conversation with a parent or guardian of a neurodivergent child, preferably from your own congregation. Listen to their story and ask what their experience in church has been. Glean ideas from them on how to make the workshop most relevant for families of neurodivergent children. Use their answers to personalize your seminar and help you create a safe and non-judgmental environment that respects the diversity of your audience.

INTRODUCTION

In today's society, neurodivergence is gaining increasing recognition and relevance. The local church can play a pivotal role in supporting parents with a neurodivergent child. Neurodiversity encompasses a range of conditions such as ADHD (Attention-Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), Autism, Dyslexia, and more, as outlined by the American Psychiatric Association (APA). There is a spectrum of neurodivergent experiences, and a need exists to address the stigmas and misconceptions surrounding them.

Families of neurodivergent children face unique daily challenges, and every community of faith should be interested in making every family member feel welcome and supported in the church family. The church has the transformative potential to support neurodivergent families. We emphasize the importance of creating a welcoming environment, fostering acceptance, and promoting understanding.

UNDERSTANDING NEURODIVERGENCE

Neurodivergence is a multifaceted concept encompassing various neurological conditions and differences that deviate from neurotypical or typical neurological functioning. Within this

spectrum, some of the most well-known conditions include Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), and Dyslexia. However, it's crucial to acknowledge that neurodivergence extends beyond these examples and includes other conditions like Tourette's Syndrome, Sensory Processing Disorder, and more. This diversity highlights the complexity of neurodivergent experiences and the need for a nuanced understanding. It's important to note that these conditions often coexist and manifest differently in each person, emphasizing the unique nature of neurodivergent experiences.

The spectrum of neurodivergent experiences is broad and heterogeneous. Individuals within this spectrum may have many strengths, challenges, and unique perspectives. Some may excel in specific areas like mathematics, art, or music while facing social interaction or communication difficulties. Others might display heightened sensory sensitivities or exhibit exceptional attention to detail. Understanding neurodivergence necessitates recognizing and celebrating these differences, as they contribute to the rich tapestry of human diversity. By acknowledging the spectrum of neurodivergent experiences, we can foster an inclusive and supportive society and church community that values and accommodates the unique strengths and needs of neurodivergent individuals.

CHALLENGES FACED BY FAMILIES WITH NEURODIVERGENT CHILDREN

Families raising neurodivergent children encounter many challenges, often beginning with the pervasive stigmas and misconceptions that persist in society. These stigmas can create isolation and shame for parents and children alike. Misconceptions about neurodivergent conditions can lead to unfair judgments and stereotypes, perpetuating the idea that these children are inherently flawed or less capable. Such negative perceptions hinder social acceptance and impede access to vital support and resources.

In addition to the societal stigma, daily life for these families can be filled with unique caregiving challenges. Neurodivergent children may require specialized care, therapies, and educational accommodations. Navigating a complex web of appointments, therapies, and Individualized Education Plans (IEPs) can overwhelm parents. The financial burden of these services can be substantial, further compounding the stress on families. Moreover, the unpredictability of neurodivergent conditions, such as meltdowns or sensory sensitivities, can make daily life challenging, impacting family routines and relationships.

(If relevant, the presenter can insert/share excerpts from conversations held with neurodivergent families before the seminar or ask if any attendees, especially neurodivergent family members, would like to share some challenges.) Understanding families' challenges with neurodivergent children is the first step in fostering empathy and support within communities, particularly the church, as they play a vital role in mitigating these challenges and offering solace to these families.

THE ROLE OF THE CHURCH IN SUPPORTING THESE FAMILIES

Let's look at what the Bible says about our responsibility to one another in society, particularly the church. Matthew 25:40 states, "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.' Jesus says this will be said to the righteous who will inherit the kingdom because they "gave me food...took Me in...visited Me..." (Matthew 25:35, 36). Jesus is equally concerned about what will happen to those who do not care for those around them. Continue reading Matthew 25:41-46, "And these will go away into everlasting punishment, but the righteous into eternal life."

The church holds a profound and influential role in supporting families with neurodivergent children, beginning with creating a welcoming environment. Inclusivity should be at the core of a church's mission, extending a warm embrace to all members of the congregation, regardless of their neurodivergent status. This welcoming environment encompasses physical accessibility, sensory considerations, and a culture promoting acceptance and understanding. It is a space where neurodivergent individuals and their families feel valued, respected, and free to participate fully in the church community.

Acceptance and understanding are vital pillars in the church's support for these families. By fostering a culture of acceptance, the church sends a powerful message that every individual, regardless of their neurological differences, is a cherished member of the community. Understanding goes hand in hand with acceptance, as it involves educating congregants about neurodivergence, its various facets, and the unique challenges these families face. Recognizing the diverse spectrum of neurodivergent experiences and the strengths that come with it is essential in promoting a culture of empathy and inclusion.

Understanding the characteristics of neurodivergence is vital for creating a supportive environment within the church. Do you know why the four-year-old boy in your child's Sabbath School class wears headphones or flaps his arms incessantly (autism spectrum)? Do you get irritated when the 14-year-old girl only stares at you when you speak to her (sensory processing or social anxiety)? The church can become a sanctuary where neurodivergent children and their families can find solace, camaraderie, and spiritual nourishment on their unique journeys.

PRACTICAL STEPS FOR CHURCHES

To effectively support neurodivergent families within congregations, churches can take practical steps that promote awareness, inclusion, and a sense of community. Firstly, educating the congregation is paramount. Hosting awareness events or workshops that shed light on neurodivergence, its various conditions, and the unique challenges these families face can enlighten church members. These events serve to dispel misconceptions and foster empathy.

By drawing from the insights of experts and sharing personal stories, congregants can gain a deeper understanding of neurodivergence. This seminar is the beginning of creating awareness; consistent awareness activities are essential to keeping the church family aware and remaining intentional about creating an inclusive church home for neurodivergent families.

Specialized resources play a crucial role in providing support. Churches can create or highlight existing support groups specifically tailored to the needs of neurodivergent families. These groups offer a safe space for parents to connect, share experiences, and exchange advice. They also serve as platforms for emotional support, resource sharing, and building a strong sense of community within the church.

Adapting Sabbath school, Youth, and other programs is another vital step. Ensuring these programs are inclusive and accessible to neurodivergent children is essential for their spiritual growth. This may involve modifying teaching methods, providing sensory accommodations, and offering one-on-one support. Inclusivity in church programs ensures that all children can actively engage with their faith regardless of their neurological differences.

Fostering connections within the congregation is also essential. Encouraging mentorship and peer-support programs for neurodivergent children and their families, also pairing parents/guardians with other families who can provide companionship and support. These connections promote social integration, boost self-esteem, and help neurodivergent children and their families feel valued members of the church community. Suppose churches earnestly seek to implement these practical steps effectively by following these measures. In that case, they can not only provide crucial support to neurodivergent families but also demonstrate their commitment to creating inclusive and welcoming faith communities.

COLLABORATING WITH PROFESSIONALS

For churches to provide adequate support to neurodivergent individuals and their families, it is imperative that church leaders collaborate with experts in the field of neurodiversity. These professionals bring specialized knowledge, research-backed strategies, and practical insights that can significantly enhance the church's ability to meet the unique needs of neurodivergent congregants. By forging strong partnerships with experts, church leaders can access a wealth of resources and guidance to create more inclusive and accommodating environments.

One critical aspect of this collaboration is incorporating feedback from neurodivergent individuals and their families. Actively seeking input and listening to their experiences can lead to developing evidence-based strategies that genuinely address their needs. The feedback process fosters a sense of agency and belonging within the community, allowing neurodivergent individuals to actively shape the church's support initiatives. This collaborative approach ensures that the church's efforts are well-intentioned, directly relevant, and effective.

Research underscores the profound impact that religious communities can have on the well-being of individuals, including neurodivergent individuals. By leveraging the expertise of professionals and actively involving neurodivergent individuals and their families in the process, churches can play a pivotal role in enhancing the overall well-being and quality of life of this unique and diverse population.

GROUP EXERCISE

Break up into groups of 5-6 people. Discuss and write down your answers to the following questions:

1. Discuss the various neurodiversity conditions (ADHD, Autism, etc.). Be sure to include conditions that were not covered previously.
 2. What are some of the challenges faced by neurodivergent children/teens/adults and their families?
 3. In what ways has your local church marginalized or included neurodivergent families?
 4. How can our church implement some of the strategies discussed in this seminar immediately? Within the next month, quarter, year?
 5. How does the parable in Matthew 25 compel or encourage us to do more for those who need greater inclusion, compassion, and empathy?
 6. If time permits, the presenter should debrief the exercise. Ask one representative from the group to share a summary of their answers to the questions – only allow answers to one question at a time to allow for as many groups to share as possible.
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CONCLUSION

Supporting neurodivergent children and their families within the church community is not only a compassionate endeavor with far-reaching societal implications but also has eternal significance. When churches commit to creating inclusive environments, fostering acceptance, and providing tailored support, they contribute to a more equitable, empathetic society and represent Jesus to these families and the community. By valuing and accommodating neurodivergent individuals, churches enrich their communities and set an example for others to follow.

Neurodivergent children and their families often face isolation and discrimination in a world that does not always comprehend their unique needs. The church, as a source of spiritual guidance and community, has the potential to offer solace, belonging, and a sense of purpose to these individuals and their families. As we collectively strive for a more inclusive and compassionate society, local churches must rise to the occasion, championing the cause of neurodiversity and affirming the inherent worth of every congregation member. In doing so, they not only fulfill their spiritual mission but also make a profound and lasting impact on the lives they touch.

“By this, all will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another.” John 13:35. In a world where there is so much chaos and darkness, may we, Christ’s disciples, shed the light of Jesus to those around us.

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HELPFUL WEBSITES:

- National Collaborative on Faith and Disability - They offer resources, webinars, and information on supporting people with disabilities in faith communities.
- Autism Faith Network - Provides resources and stories related to autism and faith communities.

HOW TO TALK TO YOUR CHILDREN (OR ANYONE) ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY (LGBTQ+): A SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

BY WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

THE TEXTS

Isaiah 43:1

Jeremiah 1:5

Psalm 139:14

NOTE TO PRESENTERS:

Please present this seminar precisely as it is written. Before making this presentation, please read the Seventh-day Adventist statements and guidelines on alternative sexuality, which are

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at the back of this resource book. Pay close attention to the tone of the statements and guidelines and the language used. Understand the difference between homosexual practice and homosexual orientation, compassion, empathy, and affirmation. Be sure to allow the fruit of the Spirit to shine through you in your presentation so that it is evident that God is love and that the Seventh-day Adventist Church worships a God of love. We are not against anyone; we are simply for what is in God's Word, the Bible.

We recognize the ever changing and expansion of inclusivity defined in the acronym LGBTQ+, which stands for lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer, and other sexual identities which exist and want to be as inclusive and sensitive as possible. However, for purposes of this seminar we will use only LGBTQ to incorporate all peoples covered under this umbrella.

Lastly, please do not add personal stories or testimonies while presenting, which we typically encourage with other seminars in this resource book, however, not this time. The editors realize that given this sensitive topic, participants may want to share their stories and experiences; so to allow for some flexibility, be prepared to manage the audience and keep all participants from monopolizing or changing the direction of the intended purpose and framework of this seminar. Aim to provide a safe, loving, and non-judgmental space for parents/people to learn, ask questions, and grow in their understanding of their LGBTQ child or friend.

To best facilitate this, we recommend that you ask participants to hold their questions and comments until the end of the seminar unless it is a point that was just presented and needs clarification. When answering questions, please do not rely on your own opinions, and do not argue or become defensive. Always show empathy to the participants and use only the information provided here. Lastly, if you are a local church leader presenting this seminar, please get authorization from your pastoral team before scheduling and presenting this seminar.

BEHIND THE ACRONYM ARE PEOPLE THAT WE KNOW AND LOVE

According to a recent Gallup poll, the percentage of U.S. adults who identify as something other than heterosexual has doubled from 3.5 percent in 2012 to 7.1 percent in 2022.¹ This increase is primarily due mostly to the high LGBTQ self-identification, particularly as bisexual, among the Generation Z adults who are ages 18-25. For GenZ, more than 1 in 5, or 21 percent identify as LGBTQ. Globally, on average, 80 percent identify as heterosexual and 20 percent identify as gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, asexual, or other.²

Undeniably, we are living in a time of what is known as sexual fluidity or non-binary expression of gender. Fluidity means that gender can or does change over time, and non-binary means that some people believe they may not fit neatly into the category of being either male or female. As these sexual trends shift globally, so too will trends shift in the church. Thus, we are likely to see more young people—in our families, schools, and churches questioning their sexuality, their identity, and the biblical sexual ethic they've been taught or sadly never taught. While it is said that

values are caught not taught, sexuality is a topic that requires intentional conversations, and these should begin from birth.

With these veritable truisms, what remains at the heart of these trends and the LGBTQ conversation are people—real people with real feelings, attractions, and a yearning to love and be loved. Most people reading or listening to this seminar know someone who identifies as LGBTQ, a friend, neighbor, co-worker, distant relative, parent or child. So, to begin to understand LGBTQ, we must first stop saying “those people” and making a distinction between “them” and “us.” We ALL long for belonging, a yearning to be loved, and a deep desire for intimacy. ALL humankind wants to be treated with respect and dignity. If we keep this in mind, the rest of this seminar will be easier to comprehend.

As a community of faith and disciples of Jesus Christ, we have no choice but to love like Jesus. We are compelled to spread the good news of the gospel to everyone and to lead people by our words and actions into a saving knowledge of the One who died so that we all have abundant life. The same God who promised Israel freedom from bondage, despite their rebellious nature and infidelity, still intends to keep His promises of a hopeful future and restored identity to us today.³ “But now, thus says the Lord, who created you, O Jacob, and He who formed you, O Israel: “Fear not, for I have redeemed you; I have called you by your name; You are Mine.” Isaiah 43:1. We are the conduits through which all people may find freedom and a new identity in Christ, including those who identify as LGBTQ. All have sinned and are inadequate to receive God’s grace, but His love is steadfast, and He provides new mercies every morning. (*Romans 3:23, Lamentations 3:22*)

DIGNITY AND COMPASSION FOR ALL: UNDERSTANDING THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST POSITION ON HOMOSEXUALITY

So, what is the position of the Seventh-day Adventist Church on the topic of Homosexuality? It is essential to know what the church’s statements say and how we can share our position in a positive and winsome manner. Equally as important is knowing that it is from the word of God, and the heart of it is love for God’s people. SDA Statements and guidelines are developed with much prayer, thought, study of God’s word, and study of various disciplines on the intended topic by the theologians from the SDA Biblical Research Institute and, depending on the topic, may include SDA physicians, sociologists, psychologists, ethicists, and other relevant professionals. These statements and guidelines are not based solely on one person’s opinions with a group of supporters who endorse that person’s opinion or scholars from other denominations or the latest evidence-based findings. Personal biases are put to the side as much as is humanly possible, and there is a deep search for divine guidance from the Bible. These statements and guidelines reflect a biblical worldview and not a contemporary popular secular worldview. As people of faith, we should always seek to, first and foremost, use a biblical worldview as our framework for understanding even contemporary issues. The Bible is relevant for all ages.

GROUP EXERCISE:

Presenter: Display the *Seventh-day Adventist Position Statement on Homosexuality* on the screen (you will need to put it on a slide in the presentation). Read aloud the statement and ask participants to follow along with you. After reading, spend 5 minutes debriefing with the audience, pointing out the emphasis on the dignity of all human beings. Also reiterate that the SDA church does not in any way support or endorse mistreatment, bullying, or condemnation of LGBTQ people. The statement specifically speaks to homosexual practice and recognizes that there are many homosexual and heterosexual people who abstain from sexual practices that do not align with God's plan for humankind. While this seminar does not permit a review of all the statements, please encourage participants to read the other statements pertaining to marriage and sexuality:

- <https://family.adventist.org/resources/real-answers/statement-of-concern-on-sexual-behavior/>
 - <https://family.adventist.org/people/couples/an-affirmation-of-gods-gift-of-sexuality/>
 - <https://family.adventist.org/resources/real-answers/seventh-day-adventist-response-to-same-sex-unions-a-reaffirmation-of-christian-marriage/>
 - <https://www.adventist.org/official-statements/statement-on-transgenderism/>
-

UNDERSTANDING LGBTQ

Throughout the years, various words have taken on a different meanings and new terminology has emerged especially regarding LGBTQ people. Here we will share a list of key terms⁴ that are essential to understanding the current dialogue. It is by no means an exhaustive list, but it will help you begin to understand and engage in the conversation. Some of the language may make you uncomfortable or you may have some concerns about using such language, just know it is okay for you to sit with this discomfort. Using the language or understanding it doesn't mean that you condone behavior, it just gives us a better grasp of how we can engage with the LGBTQ community in a more Christ-centered way. Please keep in mind that we are not endorsing any activity that does not align with God's word, however, we are simply hoping to increase an understanding of language and encourage sensitivity as we listen and speak. Most of you will most likely never have use all these words, however, it is beneficial to know and understand the terminology.

- **Sexual Identity:** Term a person uses to describe their sexuality or sexual orientation.
- **Homosexual:** A person who is attracted to the same sex/gender. In society at large, this word is now considered derogatory and offensive, the word **queer** is the preferred term. While the word homosexuality is used in the Scripture, when referencing LGBTQ

people, it is best to use language that people use to define themselves. If it does not compromise your core beliefs and values, even if you are uncomfortable with it, you can honor the request. To be sure, it is always safe to say LGBTQ, if you prefer not to use queer.

- **Straight/Heterosexual:** A person who is attracted exclusively to the opposite sex/gender.
- **Queer:** An umbrella term referring to LGBTQ people. In the past it was considered a derogatory term but has recently been reclaimed as an empowering identifier. It is used interchangeably with LGBTQ.
- **LGBTQ+:** Acronym that means Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer or Questioning (+Intersex, Asexual, etc.)
- **Homosexual orientation:** an enduring pattern of emotional, romantic, and/or sexual attractions to members of one's own sex (same-sex attraction). To be differentiated from homosexual practice. A person may have a same-sex attraction but not engage in homosexual practice.
- **Homosexual practice:** sexual practices between people of the same sex.
- **Cisgender:** Term that is used to describe people whose gender identity matches the sex they were assigned at birth as opposed to transgender, one who changes their biological sex.
- **Coming out:** A lifelong process of self-acceptance which may include public sharing, to parents, friends, coworkers, etc. but doesn't have to.
- **Bicurious:** A person is exploring whether or not they are attracted to people of the same gender as well as people of different genders.
- **Gender dysphoria:** psychological distress that can result from an incongruence between one's assigned sex at birth or biological sex and one's gender identity. Gender dysphoria is no longer treated as a mental illness.
- **Gender identity:** A person's internal, deeply held sense of their gender. For trans(gender) people, their sense of sexual identity does not match the sex they were born with.
- **Nonbinary:** People who experience their gender identity and/or gender expression as falling outside the categories of man and woman; could be somewhere in-between man or woman or totally different than these terms.
- **Asexual:** Experiencing minimal to no sexual attraction to other individuals.
- **Intersex:** A person born with male and female genitalia. Commonly and derogatorily referred to as hermaphrodite.
- **They/their/them:** Pronouns used for someone who identifies as neither male nor female (for example: nonbinary).
- **Same-sex Attraction:** Used primarily by those who want to share about their attraction toward the same sex/gender without labeling themselves as LGBTQ. This is considered offensive to many LGBTQ people because it is usually connected to ex-gay people, and they believe it diminishes their sexual identity. (Note: As we've discussed, everyone wants to be respected and addressed by terminology that honors them, as such, those who choose

not to call themselves LGBTQ should have their definition of identity respected. There is no hierarchy of respect; we all need to respect one another.)

- **Ally:** A straight/heterosexual/cisgender person who supports and advocates for LGBTQ people.

The terms and definitions listed above are defined by the APA or LGBTQ advocates. In many organizations, employees are required to use these terms appropriately or there are negative repercussions. Again, while we may not believe or endorse LGBTQ practices, we believe that where possible, we should allow space for where we can honor these terms as a form of respect to how LGBTQ persons choose to be addressed. It is also critical to understand these terms so that as a community of faith we fully understand how to convey our own beliefs.

Here are a few definitions of terms⁵ that Seventh-day Adventist believers should incorporate into our understanding and conversation of LGBTQ people.

- **Compassion:** A feeling of deep sympathy and sorrow for another who is stricken by misfortune, accompanied by a strong desire to alleviate the suffering.
- **Grace:** favor or goodwill. Theology—the freely given, unmerited favor and love of God.
- **Empathy:** The psychological identification with or vicarious experiencing of the emotions, thoughts, or attitudes of another.
- **Acceptance:** An honest acknowledgement of the reality of a situation. Acceptance does not inherently mean agreement or feeling comfortable with a situation. It is the ability to practice unconditional love.

These words, however, should not be used or understood to mean *affirmation* of LGBTQ practices

- **Affirmation:** The assertion that something exists or is true; confirmation or ratification of the truth.
- **Law definition:** A solemn declaration accepted instead of a statement under oath. (Dictionary.com)

Despite many plausible assertions from scientific inquiry about identity formation and psychological development, our identity comes from being created in the image of God. Sexual identity is only part of our identity. Yes, it is a large part of our identity since our gender is a significant part of who we are. However, regardless of one's sexual orientation, all human beings have a sinful orientation, which means the goal is not so much about heterosexuality as it is about holiness. Whether one has an LGBTQ orientation or a heterosexual orientation unless one's sexuality is under the Lordship of Jesus Christ—which means a determination to honor God in all one does—one is in a dangerous place. The good news is, as Jesus said: “I came that they may have life and have it abundantly.” John 10:10 ESV. This is God's promise to everyone who determines to do His will.

HOW DO WE HELP OUR CHILDREN UNDERSTAND LGBTQ

At the beginning of this seminar, we discussed the reality that most of today's children/youth, and we would dare to say, a large percentage of older adults, believe that LGBTQ is a non-issue. Our youth see themselves as allies or advocates (refer to definitions above) of LGBTQ people. They believe that God is love and that God would not hate anyone. This is true! God is love! God does not hate anyone! And yes, God desires that we would obey Him in the way that He has commanded (Deuteronomy 12:31). All truth, but the topic must be approached with much sensitivity, empathy, compassion and grace and genuine unconditional love for our children and those they seek to protect and defend.

LGBTQ youth are facing many challenges, and our children see them as the “least of these” that Jesus speaks about. As parents, we regularly encourage our children to show kindness and look out for those who need help, so youth today see this as their issue. Some of these issues include mental health issues, bullying and discrimination, and identity development issues. LGBTQ youth are at a higher risk of experiencing depression, anxiety, and suicidal ideation. The root of these issues often lies in external societal pressures, family rejection, or bullying. This can have long-lasting psychological effects on them and lead to physical harm. LGBTQ youth also struggle with their identity because sexual identity is so closely tied into our overall identity, it may lead to feelings of isolation and confusion.

Parents and families can play a pivotal role in helping children understand their own sexual identity and what the Bible has to say about who we are as God's creatures. Ideally, parents should begin a dialogue of sexuality from birth, verbalizing that God, the Creator made us male and female, in His image. Genesis 1:26: Then God said, “Let us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness...” Parents can use many teachable moments, while changing a diaper, describing body parts, discussing friend relationships, to talk about God's plan for our sexual identity. This conversation does not make us heterosexually biased or discriminatory; it is our biblical worldview and deserves to be respected as any other worldview. However, as we have consistently said, this does not mean we should speak disparagingly about any group of people, specifically LGBTQ as we are discussing here. “Christ Himself did not suppress one word of truth, but He spoke it always in love. He exercised the greatest tact, and thoughtful, kind attention in His intercourse with the people. He was never rude, never needlessly spoke a severe word, never gave needless pain to a sensitive soul.” (White, 1940, p. 353)

Here are some guidelines to use when discussing LGBTQ with your children (teens, adults, anyone):

Listen, Listen, Listen. Practice active listening. This means listening first for understanding before speaking. Put yourselves in their shoes, try to empathize with their feelings and concerns. Don't feel that you must have all the right responses right away. Sometimes, you may just say, “I hear you and understand, can I take some time to respond, and can I give you a warm hug while we both take time to process this.”

Educate Yourself. Become familiar with the terms shared, especially those you haven't heard before or fully understood. Having this knowledge helps to dispel previously held myths and prejudices.

Know What You Believe. Are you convicted about a biblical worldview? Do you believe what the bible says and what the SDA church espouses? For instance, did you know that The Seventh-day Adventist Church does not believe in conversion therapy. However, we do believe in spiritual conversion and transformation through the power of God, "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror, the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as by the Spirit of the Lord." 2 Corinthians 3:18. This is not against the law. Rather, this means believing God can do anything. Again, we don't know what that conversion and transformation will look like, but we leave that up to God. But it will be difficult for you to explain this your child if you are not convicted in your belief of a mighty omnipotent all loving God.

Stay away from pithy cliches. Conversations about sexuality have long been a topic of discomfort which often pushes people to make trivial comments or awkward jokes such as "God didn't make Adam and Steve." Although, we know subconsciously know these jokes might be hurtful, we laugh, mostly out of our nervousness and discomfort. Even the saying "love the sinner, hate the sin" although true is very offensive to our youth and LGBTQ people. It is best to engage in a genuine and sincere dialogue with your youth and ask God for wisdom to give you words that will encourage openness and trust. Remember that "Pleasant words are like a honeycomb sweetness to the soul and health to the bones." Proverbs 16:24.

Don't lecture or be argumentative. Take a position of learner rather than lecturer. Be humble and pure in heart. "Let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger." James 1:19, ESV. Take advantage of the opportunity to build trust with your child and listen to their heart. Be proactive and don't react to statements that are theologically false; truth is important, but your child won't be able to hear truth if they don't feel they have been heard.

GOD'S APPROACH TO DIFFICULT CONVERSATIONS

Much of the information shared in this seminar about the biblical position on LGBTQ is for clarity and understanding of what the Bible has to say and to become more educated about terminology most of your youth already know. We then shared some tips on how to have an open dialogue with your child or anyone else on LGBTQ. While this seminar may provide some counsel on how to talk to your child if they "come out" to you, that conversation falls outside of the scope of this seminar. However, every interaction we have with our children on any topic should always reveal the unfailing, immeasurable love of God. As such, the essence of every conversation about LGBTQ is to keep God at the center.

The apostle Paul reminds us in Romans 5:8 that, "God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us." Pray deeply and earnestly for God's power and guidance as you dialogue with others especially regarding LGBTQ. Every conversation with your youth will either push them closer to you and to God or push them away. God is always trying to draw

us closer to Him, “The Lord has appeared of old to me, saying, “Yes, I have loved you with an everlasting love; therefore with lovingkindness I have drawn you.” (Jeremiah 31:3). Let’s be sure to be conduits of God’s love and light to one another.

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NOTES

- ¹ <https://news.gallup.com/poll/329708/lgbt-identification-rises-latest-estimate.aspx>
- ² <https://www.ipsos.com/en/ipsos-lgbt-pride-2021-global-survey>
- ³ Andrews Study Bible Notes. Isaiah 43:1–28 God’s love for Israel and His faithfulness to the covenant are central elements to understanding the paradoxes of the book of Isaiah: oracles of judgment and salvation, threats of destruction, and promises of preservation of a remnant that will carry on the identity and mission of God’s people.
- ⁴ American Psychological Association (APA). Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion: Inclusive language guide, 2nd ed., apa.org
- ⁵ Dictionary.com

BECOMING POWERFUL BY EMPOWERING

BY WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

TEXT

Jeremiah 31:3

THEME

In the Old and New Testaments there are four elements that characterize healthy, Godlike relationships: Covenant, Grace, Empowerment, and Intimacy. All of these traits come together to form a true covenant relationship that represents the kind of relationship God intends for His people.

OBJECTIVE

In this seminar we will focus primarily on empowerment. The primary objective is to identify a model of power that comes through empowerment for healthier relationships.

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FORMAT

This workshop can be presented as one workshop with two parts or two separate workshops.

Part One: Power and Control in Relationships

Part Two: Empowering One Another

PART ONE: POWER AND CONTROL

The will to dominate is one of the strongest human tendencies—to not only be in control of ourselves but also to control others. Power is a dimension found in all human relationships. (Balswick & Balswick, 2007)

In domestic violence there is always a power imbalance or misuse of power. Domestic violence is characterized by fear, control, and harm. One person in the relationship uses coercion or force to control the other person or other family members. The abuse can be physical, sexual, or emotional. (Fortune, 2002)

There are several reasons why abusers or batterers may choose to abuse their power:

1. He thinks it is his right, that is, part of his role.
2. He feels entitled to use force.
3. He has learned this behavior in his past.
4. This behavior works.

In most reported cases of abuse the abuser is male; hence, throughout this workshop the abuser will be referred to primarily as male. However, keep in mind that abusers can also be female. It doesn't matter who is doing the abusing, there is no acceptance of abuse in healthy, Godly relationships.

Abusers assume they have the right to control all members of their family. This willingness to use violence to accomplish this control is from things that he has learned. From various sources, the abuser has learned that is appropriate for the person who is bigger and stronger (usually a male) to hit others "for their own good" or because he "loves them."

AGREE-DISAGREE EXERCISE

To start the group thinking about power and control in relationships, invite them to respond to the following agree/disagree statements. Do not discuss the statements now or offer your opinion. (They are designed to be somewhat ambiguous and controversial, and to get people to start thinking about their own behaviors and where they learned them. Tell the participants to put their thumbs up if they agree, and down if they disagree.

Agree/Disagree	Spare the rod and spoil the child.
Agree/Disagree	Power in the family must reside with the father.
Agree/Disagree	Parents must show their teenagers who is boss.
Agree/Disagree	Husbands must give their wives a little push sometimes to maintain authority.
Agree/Disagree	The Bible teaches that wives must submit to their husbands no matter what he does.

WHAT ARE POSSIBLE SOURCES OF LEARNED BEHAVIOR OF ABUSERS?

- Observing parents
 - Peers
 - Misinterpretation of biblical teachings
 - Media – jokes, cartoons, soap operas, movies that portray control and abuse in an intimate relationship as normative.
-

PARTICIPANT EXERCISE

- All abusers have learned to use force through experience. When abusers first used force to control a family member, there were no negative consequences—no one objected, no one stopped them; no one questioned their behavior.
 - Can you think of any situation where this could happen either unconsciously or on purpose? (Give participants a few seconds to respond. Discourage participants from sharing personal experiences.)
-

Since there were no negative consequences, the abuser learned that violence worked; it got him what he wanted—either the submission or compliance of their spouse or other family member. Paradoxically, they learned that home and family was a safe place in which to exercise violent behavior. On a very cognitive level, they know that this behavior would have very negative and serious consequences if used in the workplace. If they hit their boss when they were angry, they would most likely be fired or arrested. Hence, abusers are rarely violent at work.

FACTS ABOUT ABUSER'S NEED FOR POWER

1. Battering is not the result of an abuser (or batterer) being out of control; it is the attempt of the batterer to stay in control. He gets to choose his behavior.
2. The abuser's need to control family members appears to increase with stress in his life.

- Stress may be internal (inability to communicate with spouse, child is not doing well in school, parent died, dinner is late). He may feel disappointment with his family but mostly with himself.
- Stress may be external (gets laid off from work or doesn't get a promotion, community football team lost season championship).
- All these events may lead to emotions that may not be considered "masculine" (disappointment, anxiety, grief, etc.).
- He uses anger to express or cover real emotions, seeking to regain control of his life.

Note: This cycle of anger could be experienced by anyone, not just males. Often individuals use anger to express their true feelings and emotions. It is important that one learn to identify true feelings such as hurt, disappointment, discouragement, insecurity, grief, etc.

MISCONCEPTIONS ABOUT ABUSE:

1. ***Abuse is not caused by alcohol or drugs.*** While there might be some correlation, abuse is not *caused* by the use of drugs or alcohol. It is important to remember that alcohol or drug treatment will not (in most cases) stop violence. This treatment may be a first step, but the abuser still needs to treat the specific problem of using violence as a form of power and control.
2. ***Abuse is not caused by the relationship.*** While there may be some aspects of the marriage or other familial relationship that may be stressful to the abuser, (i.e. lack of communication, financial problems, sexual dysfunction, parenting problems), this does not cause violence in the relationship. There are other relationships that have the same problems, yet violence is not a part of their solution. Abusers must learn that violence is not the way to solve problems. Abusers must treat their violence issues, and then, if it is safe, work on the marriage and family relationship.
3. ***The victim does not cause abuse.*** The behavior of the victim does not cause the abuser's violence. Helping a victim to change their behavior such as wearing prettier clothes, cooking nicer meals, losing weight, will not stop the violence. It is the abuser, not the victim, who is in control of the violence.
4. ***The Abuser is not an ogre.*** He may be a good provider, a good father, an upstanding member of the church and community. He may be very charming and outgoing. His wife may love him and be emotionally dependent on him. Sadly, this does not mean that he is not abusing members of his family. It is sometimes difficult to believe a woman who tells how violent and abusive her husband is at home when at church he behaves like the nicest, kindest, and most reliable member. Her story contradicts what everyone in the public arena has witnessed; hence the tendency is to trust one's own experience and to disbelieve the horrible story. However, it is important to understand that in most cases, women and children do not lie about their abuse. Remember, most cases of abuse go unreported.

WHY DOES A VICTIM STAY IN AN UNBEARABLE SITUATION?

- Emotional dependency
- Economic dependency
- Need for a father (or other parent) for the children
- Urging by other family members to stay
- Religious values
- Having no place to go
- FEAR—the primary reason why most women stay or go back

The real question is how does a victim of abuse get her life together and leave. The most important resource needed by victims and survivors is a means to break the silence and isolation and to find support.

GROUP EXERCISE

If the group is large, divide participants into groups of 4-5 and have participants discuss in small groups. Give groups 10-15 minutes to discuss the following questions, then share ideas as an entire group.

1. One of the possible traits of a victim of domestic violence is their distorted view of God and spiritual issues. What might some of these inaccurate ways of thinking be, and where might they have begun in their story of domestic violence. What or who might have influenced them to think in these inappropriate ways, and how might they affect the life of the victim?

Note to Presenter: Skip part 2 of this group exercise if you are continuing on to the second part of the workshop. If you are only doing the “Power and Control” segment, then continue to part 2 of this group exercise.

2. Consider the following passages: Psalm 27:14; Psalm 29:10, 11; Exodus 3:11; Exodus 4:1-4; 2 Chronicles 14:11; John 1:12; 2 Corinthians 12:9; Nehemiah 8:10; Philippians 4:13; Ephesians 1:17-19. What conclusions can you draw about empowerment from a biblical perspective?
-

PART TWO: EMPOWERING ONE ANOTHER

Since the beginning of history there have been power struggles between family members. There was Adam and Eve against God. The first act of aggression in the Bible was Cain killing his

brother Abel out of jealousy. These power struggles remind us of the distortion that has occurred in human relationships since the fall. Everything that God created perfect has been corrupted and distorted by the evil one. (Balswick & Balswick, 2007)

However, the message of restoration and renewal is seen throughout the Old and New Testaments. God has provided a way for us to lead lives of empowerment and service through His resurrection and the empowering of the Holy Spirit. We are called to build each other up; this is the privilege and opportunity of the empowering process.

TYPES OF POWER

Authority vs. Dominance

Legitimate power is authority

Illegitimate power is dominance

Legitimate power is usually sanctioned by society and thus possesses authority. For example, parental power is considered legitimate power. Most societies grant parents authority over their children until the children reach a legal age of maturity. This age differs from culture to culture.

Dominance is power that is taken without being sanctioned by society; therefore, it is considered illegitimate. For instance, some parents may go beyond their boundaries of legitimate power or may neglect their responsibilities and will have their legitimate power taken away from them by society, e.g., child abuse or child neglect.

Power that is gained through dominance or intimidation is the opposite of the empowering model that is represented in the scriptures.

ASK GROUP

What is Empowerment?

Webster's Dictionary defines "empower" as "to give power to; authorize; to enable."

Balswick and Balswick say this about empowerment:

Empowerment is born out of God's covenant love and the incredible grace we find in Christ Jesus. The Spirit of God empowers us to empower others. And when mutual empowerment occurs among family members, each will be stretched in the extraordinary ways of servant love and humility. Family members will grow in the stature of Christ as they mature into the character of Christ in their

daily interactions...It has nothing to do with having power over others but rather involves taking great delight in building up one another to become all God wants us to be. (Balswick and Balswick, 2014, p. 29)

1 Corinthians 8:1b (ESV) expresses it thus: “Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.”

GROUP EXERCISE

Consider the following passages: Psalm 27:14; Psalm 29:10, 11; Exodus 3:11; Exodus 4:1-4; 2 Chronicles 14:11; John 1:12; 2 Corinthians 12:9; Nehemiah 8:10; Philippians 4:13; Ephesians 1:17-19. What conclusions can you draw about empowerment from a biblical perspective?

MODELS OF FAMILY POWER

	Basic Assumption
Traditional Patriarchal	God has determined that ultimate power resides in the role of the husband
Democratic Exchange	Power does not reside in any one individual, but rather in the family as a whole operating as a democracy.
Hedonistic Self-Interest	Each family member watches out for self.
Empowerment	Family members use their gifts and resources for one another.

*Balswick and Balswick (2014)

BASIC MODELS OF FAMILY POWER

PATRIARCHAL MODEL

The patriarchal model still exists in most societies today. In many Christian homes, the belief is that where the Bible speaks of the man as head of the home, it means the man should be the “boss” and that submission means the wife has no authority in the home. However, it’s important to note that that scripture also speaks about mutual submission and the suffering servant role modeled by Christ (Ephesians 5: 21; Philippians 2:5-8).

Note: Please do not allow participants to begin a discussion on headship and submission. Keep them focused on the theme of empowerment.

Ellen White Speaks of Individuality in Marriage

God requires that the wife shall keep the fear and glory of God ever before her. Entire submission is to be made only to the Lord Jesus Christ, who has purchased her as His own child by the infinite price of His life. God has given her a conscience, which she cannot violate with impunity. Her individuality cannot be merged into that of her husband, for she is the purchase of Christ. It is a mistake to imagine that with blind devotion she is to do exactly as her husband says in all things, when she knows that in so doing, injury would be worked for her body and her spirit, which have been ransomed from the slavery of Satan. There is One who stands higher than the husband to the wife; it is her Redeemer, and her submission to her husband is to be rendered as God has directed--"as it is fit in the Lord."

Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 116

DEMOCRATIC EXCHANGE MODEL

The democratic exchange model is based on the assumption that power resides in the family unit as a whole. Family policy is determined by negotiation and bargaining. The exercise of power allows a voice to all family members, but since parents have more resources, they have more bargaining and negotiating power. Hence, parents have the final say in the decision making process. (Balswick & Balswick, 2007)

THE SELF-INTEREST MODEL

Society today is filled individualistic materialism and self-interested hedonism. "What's in it for me?" is the major concern of many. In this model "I" is number one, and personal interests and needs come before the interests of the larger system. In this model, everyone vies for a place of authority. This leads to a very chaotic system. Family members are disengaged and find very little support.

EMPOWERMENT

The empowerment model assumes that the task of the more powerful family members is to build up or lift up the less powerful family members. The concept of empowerment as a family model may not be found in the scholarly literature; however, it is exemplified in the best of Christian family life.

GROUP EXERCISE

How can we empower one another?

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4-8

Divide participants into groups of 3-4 people. Have them list ways in which Paul wants us to empower one another in our relationships.

“Thee lift me and I’ll lift thee and we’ll ascend together.”—Quaker Proverb

In empowered families, family members are living out the principle of love as expressed in 1 Corinthians 13. It is love in action. It is about paying attention to the little things because the little things really are the big things. We empower one another and lift each other up when we show kindness to one another, rather than dominance and control. Empowered families look for opportunities to lift one another up.

GROUP EXERCISE

Empowering Words

Ask participants to close their eyes and think of a time when someone said something kind or nice to them. How did that make you feel? (*Give participants time to reflect*). Ask a few participants to share their memories.

Then have participants think of a time when they said something kind or nice to their husband, child, or other family member. Push them to remember how that family member responded. (*Give participants time to reflect*). Ask a few participants to share their memories.

When we empower one another in the family, we build high trust in the relationship. When we misuse power by dominance and coercion, we tear down trust. Trust is the key in the empowering process. (Covey, 1997)

Parents who empower their children and prepare them for responsible interdependence will provide their children with the skills necessary to live as healthy adults and build and maintain healthy relationships. When parents use unhealthy forms of power and control with children, the children will grow up detached from their family and learn negative ways of using power and relating to others.

God’s covenant love and the incredible grace we find in Jesus Christ empower us to empower others. When mutual empowerment occurs among family members, each will grow exponentially in humility and servant love. Indeed, family members will begin to grow more into the likeness of Christ. His power is promised to us as we seek to become Christlike in all our relationships.

“I can do all things through Him who gives me strength.” Philippians 4:13 NIV

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Please note that the Leadership Resource: *No Excuse for Abuse in the Family*, is related to this seminar.

BALANCING THE PRACTICE OF TIME-OUT AND TIME-IN: TWO EFFECTIVE DISCIPLINE STRATEGIES FOR PARENTS

BY BRYAN CAFFERKY

WORKSHOP STATEMENT OF PURPOSE AND DESIRED OUTCOMES

This parenting workshop aims to explore and equip parents with two effective discipline strategies: Time-Out and Time-In. By understanding the underlying principles, relational benefits, and emotional considerations of each method, parents can develop a balanced approach to discipline that prioritizes self-regulation and then co-regulation, which promotes positive behavioral responses to distress and strengthens the parent-child relationship. Through interactive presentations, discussions, and roleplaying, participants will gain valuable insights and tools to implement Time-Out and Time-In strategies in their parenting journey.

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UPON SUCCESSFUL COMPLETION OF THIS WORKSHOP, PARTICIPANTS WILL:

- Understand the similarities/differences, outcomes, and benefits of Time-Out and Time-In responses to a distressed child.
- Evaluate which response (Time-Out or Time-In) would be most suited to their child(ren) and their parenting style.
- Apply the Time-Out or Time-In Decision Tree to prepare for predictable child dysregulation scenarios.
- Internalize the importance of practicing self-regulation techniques and co-regulating with their child.

Note: It is recommended you have a lead facilitator with expertise in child development and/or parenting to conduct the workshop effectively, accompanied by facilitators for each of the breakout groups (if possible, ~12 per group). The workshop duration and specific activities can be tailored to suit the available time and the needs of the participants. It is essential to create a safe and non-judgmental environment for open discussions, respecting the diverse perspectives and parenting styles of the attendees.

RESOURCES NEEDED:

- One facilitator per group (~12 parents for each breakout group)
- Printouts (or drawn on a chalkboard) of “Dr. Cafferky’s Time-Out or Time-In Decision Tree” for parents responding to dysregulated children.

WORKSHOP OUTLINE (~3 HOURS)

1. Introduction (10 minutes)

- Welcome, prayer, and introduction to the “Balancing the Practice of Time-Out and Time-In: Two Effective Discipline Strategies for Parents workshop
- Brief Icebreaker activity to create an inclusive atmosphere
- Setting expectations and objectives
- Random group assignment (~12 per group) in preparation for eventual Breakout Groups

2. Understanding Time-Out (45 minutes)

- Definition and principles of a Time-Out response to a distressed child
 - Ask participants to share what they know about Time-Out.
 - Time-Out is actually best used for parents because we have difficulty handling our own big emotions that are triggered by the child’s big emotions.
- The Opportunity: Creating space, boundaries, and clear expectations with the child
 - “When you choose to do ‘this,’ you are also choosing ‘this’ consequence.”
 - “My first job is to keep you and others safe, so we need to...”

- Strategies for effectively communicating and implementing Time-Out while maintaining a positive relationship (including parents who are willing to apologize when upset)
- Breakout Groups: Role-playing and practical application of Time-Out
 - *Leader: notice typical flat-affect or upset face and tone during their role-playing, which the child would perceive as a threat*
- Reflections and Observations: What did you notice? What if it were you?
- Addressing concerns and misconceptions about Time-Out
- Benefits and advantages of Time-Out in response to a distressed child
 - Take the child to a safe place so they can experience a different “sensory palate.”
 - The child has a chance to briefly “pause” before they reflect (but are not abandoned by their caregiver(s)/community!)
 - Time-Out is not about changing behavior. Instead, it is an opportunity for the parent to calm down before re-engaging the child in order to help the child calm down—then the parent and child can discuss what transpired.

[10 MIN BREAK RECOMMENDED]

3. Understanding Time-In (45 minutes)

- Definition and principles of a Time-In response to a distressed child
 - Ask participants to share what they know about Time-In.
 - Time-In is an opportunity for the child to co-regulate with a calm parent so that the parent shares their calmness with the child (anxiety can be shared, just like calmness can be shared) in order to teach the child their big emotions are not too big for the parent.
 - Frustration/Anger is a shield, a secondary emotion -> Usually some combination of sadness, loneliness, or fear is usually behind that frustration/anger outburst.
 - “Do you want comfort, or do you want space?” Offer children a chance to decide what they think they need.
- The Opportunity: Building empathy, co-regulation, validation, and emotional connection
- Effective communication techniques during Time-In
 - Calm demeanor, soft voice, non-anxious presence, empathetic facial expression, get down on their level, sit in your lap, phrases like: “Yeah, that makes sense why you were feeling ‘X’ that was disappointing/frustrating/unfair/hurt/etc...” and “I believe you, I’m so sorry that happened to you.”
- Breakout Groups: Role-playing and practical application of Time-In
 - *Leader: notice their attempts at empathy, connection, and validation compared to their posture during the Time-Out role play.*
- Reflections and Observations: What did you notice? What if it were you?
- Addressing concerns and misconceptions about Time-In

- Benefits and advantages of Time-In in response to a distressed child
 - Teaching emotional regulation (instead of suppression)
 - Sense their feelings are validated and that they are valuable.
 - Time-In is not about changing behavior. Instead, it is an opportunity for the parent to provide calm so that the child can learn to regulate (through co-regulation) their emotional experience. Then, the parent and child can discuss what happened.

[10 MIN BREAK RECOMMENDED]

4. Preparing Yourself for Time-Out and Time-In (45 minutes)

- Recognizing the strengths and limitations of each approach in different scenarios
- Navigate and apply the “Time-Out or Time-In Decision Tree” to common situations (see Figure 1)
- Awareness of the child’s temperament, neurodivergence, and developmental considerations
- Adapting these techniques to fit current parenting styles and underlying values
- Survey of self-regulation techniques (with the child during the Time-In or by yourself during the Time-Out—meant to help you regulate yourself before returning to the child)
- Modeling self-regulation and self-reflection for children (includes parent apologizing when the parent got too loud or demonstrative)
- Q&A session and sharing of personal experiences

5. Conclusion and Takeaways (15 minutes)

- Recap of key concepts and insights regarding Time-Out and Time-In
- Notice how these approaches (especially Time-In) could benefit other familial relationships (between spouses, among siblings, etc.)
- Provide additional resources and references and encourage ongoing learning and support.
- Closing remarks, including the reading of the accompanying Scripture verses -> invite participants to listen to these verses in the context of what we have been learning and practicing today regarding how a parent can respond to a dysregulated child.

Roleplay and Reflection Instructions: In breakout groups of ~12, have leaders facilitate the roleplaying of a parent and child interaction (~1-2 minutes), where the parent responds to a dysregulated child using the Time-Out (then later in the workshop, the Time-In) response to a dysregulated child. Have participants in the breakout group rotate into the parental role, then the child role, and observe the roleplayed interactions.

After everyone has completed this roleplay, have participants reflect upon what they observed:

- What did you notice about the overall posture of the parents?
- What about their facial expressions?
- What was the tone and volume of their voice?

- What was the height and distance from the child?
 - What was the parent communicating through their body language?
 - How could you tell whether the parent was calm or dysregulated themselves?
 - If you were the child, how would this make you feel?
-
- What did you notice about the overall posture of the children?
 - Their facial expressions?
 - Tone and volume of their voice?
 - Height and distance from the parent?
 - What was the child communicating through this body language?
 - How could you tell whether the child was calm or dysregulated?
 - If you were the parent, how would this make you feel?
-
- What was different between the Time-Out versus Time-In?
 - Discuss any other observations from the roleplay that could be helpful for them when using a Time-Out (or Time-In) response to a dysregulated child.

MAIN POINT

The Time-Out and Time-In responses to a dysregulated child are techniques primarily focused on learning and practicing emotional regulation (for the parent and for the child).

TIME-OUT

Time-Out is a disciplinary technique where a dysregulated child is temporarily separated from a situation or activity in response to their misbehavior/emotional outburst (Morawska & Sanders, 2011)—but hopefully not with the message that they are a “bad” child. Traditional “Time-Out” is when a child has what the parents view as a “negative” emotional outburst (Wong et al., 2008; Wong et al., 2009), and they are punished and sent to a designated space (such as a chair or corner) and are required to sit quietly and alone for a specific period of time. The traditional purpose of a time-out is to provide a consequence for the child’s behavior, give them an opportunity to calm down and reflect on their actions, and ultimately learn to self-regulate and make better choices. Yet what often happens is that this punishment of emotional outbursts can result in the child adopting maladaptive coping skills and increased anxiety (Cabecinha-Alati et al., 2020).

Children’s emotional outbursts are a form of communication: “I’m out of control! Help me!”. The child is not throwing a tantrum; rather, the tantrum is throwing the child. So do we really expect a dysregulated child to go into a corner indefinitely and magically figure out a way to calm down—which would be a difficult task for adults to do on our best days?

Many adults assume that when we mature, we have learned emotional regulation techniques, but most of us probably learned emotional suppression—so that we could survive our

families and not get punished for our big emotional outbursts. When this happens, these adults feel very uncomfortable with other people's big emotions (including a child's big emotions) because we have difficulty handling our own emotions—and there's a natural resonance within the emotional field of our families. Because the anxiety/frustration quickly spreads from person to person within that emotional field, the parent reacts to this perceived negative emotional outburst (Hurrell et al., 2015). Therefore, the easiest and most immediate way for an adult to feel calm is to remove the person who is not calm.

However, a more adaptive use of Time-Out is not to provide a consequence for the child's behavior, but instead, view Time-Out as offering the newly-upset parent a chance to calm themselves down! The Time-Out does not need to be long, just long enough for the parent to calm their own autonomic nervous system. Why? Because a parent is usually upset when they put a child on Time-Out and never has an upset parent been able to calm down an upset child. Calmness is not necessarily about the total absence of frustration/anger/sadness; it is more about the regained ability to choose what you say and how you behave instead of operating out of a fight/flight/freeze/fawn survival response.

Next, the calm parent returns to the dysregulated child in order to share their newly-found calmness. Then, after the child has calmed down, the parent and child can reflect on what sparked these big feelings and what they can do the next time this scenario occurs.

PROS OF TIME-OUT:

- A space for calm: Time-out removes the child from a stressful (or over-stimulating) environment and provides a new sensory palate, whether that means going inside/outside or away from noise/light/wind/etc. This sensory shift can help reset the child's autonomic nervous system for them to regain self-control. But more importantly, Time-Out provides a brief opportunity for the parent to calm themselves down before re-engaging with the dysregulated child.
- Clear boundaries: Time-Out establishes clear boundaries and expectations for handling our emotional outbursts and inappropriate behavior. This can help children understand the importance of practicing feeling and dealing with their emotions in a safe environment.
- Consistency: Time-Out can be implemented consistently across different environments and caregivers, promoting a sense of structure and predictability.
- Importance of pausing: Parents can model to the child that a little "pause" or "breath" away from the chaos can help them self-soothe and shift to a safer emotional state.

CONS OF TIME-OUT:

- Overuse or misuse: If used excessively or inconsistently, Time-Out may lose its impact and become less effective as a disciplinary technique. Also, parents may decide not to calm themselves down and never co-regulate with a distressed child. In these situations, there is never an opportunity for the child to practice emotional awareness and regulation. When this happens, the child feels

typically punished for having emotional outbursts and will learn to suppress their emotions and that it is not safe to talk about emotions with their caregivers.

- **Limited teaching opportunities:** If a parent using Time-Out primarily focuses on punishing the child rather than removing the child from the situation to create an opportunity to calm down and explore alternative behaviors or develop problem-solving skills, then the child misses out on the chance to co-regulate and reflect on their emotional experience.
- **Potential resentment:** A child may only view Time-Out as a punishment, leading to resentment or defiance, which can strain the parent-child relationship—especially if the parent does not attempt to connect with the child emotionally.
- **Lack of connection or understanding:** If the parent never re-engages with the child, then the child may not fully comprehend the purpose of Time-Out or make the connection between their behavior/outbursts and their consequences.

TIME-IN

Time-In focuses on positive reinforcement, empathetic validation, nurturing understanding, and a parent's emotional connection with the dysregulated child—rather than punishment or isolation. It involves a calm parent spending emotional energy and quality time co-regulating with the dysregulated child. Co-regulation is one of the most powerful things we can do for our child's autonomic nervous system (Erdmann & Hertel, 2019). The parent's calmness provides security for the child (Stelter & Halberstadt, 2011) because if the parent is not scared away by the child's big emotional outbursts (e.g., "I know that being a kid is difficult sometimes."), then maybe the child can learn to regulate their own emotions (Cabecinha-Alati et al., 2020).

Thus, the effectiveness of the Time-In technique is not measured by the number of times it is implemented but by the patterned positive impact on the child's ability to emotionally regulate themselves—continually modeled and shared by a calm, co-regulating parent. It can be beneficial to establish a consistent routine of using Time-In as a tool for nurturing and guiding a child (Havighurst et al., 2010). Still, the specific frequency and duration will vary based on the child's age, neurodivergence, developmental stage, temperament, safety, and other surrounding circumstances.

Ultimately, the goal of the Time-In technique is to practice self-regulation skills, foster a strong parent-child relationship, practice empathy, and promote emotional intelligence. Indeed, Time-In is more about connection than control. Furthermore, because research has shown that parenting styles predict children's ability to emotionally regulate (e.g., Hirschler-Guttenberg et al., 2015), this Time-In approach places greater importance on the parent's ability to self-soothe and regulate their own emotions before they can successfully do Time-In with their dysregulated child.

PROS OF TIME-IN:

- **Emotional connection:** Time-In allows parents to build a strong emotional connection with their child by addressing their behavior and emotions in an open, supportive, and

empathetic manner, fostering a sense of safety and security. Children learn they are not judged or condemned for having big emotions.

- **Teaching opportunities:** It provides a chance for parents to teach emotional regulation, which fosters the child's emotional and social development and pursuit of problem-solving skills. A parent's curiosity (instead of condemnation) about why the child suddenly had big feelings helps the child also become curious about their emotional experience. Learning the practice of self-soothing takes priority over rudimentary behavior modification.
- **Positive reinforcement:** Time-In emphasizes positive reinforcement and modeling desired behavior, which can help children understand the impact of their actions and make better choices in the future. This can boost self-esteem, confidence, and emotional competence in the child. Parents need to remind themselves they are probably "catching" their child's frustration/sadness/anger, and they are allowed to have a different emotional experience from their child.
- **Communication skills:** Time-In encourages open and honest communication between parents and children. By first creating a safe space for conversations, children learn to express their needs, concerns, and emotions effectively. They also develop active listening skills, empathy, and the ability to resolve conflicts constructively. These communication and conflict-resolution skills are invaluable for navigating difficult situations in the future.
- **Long-Term Relationship Building:** Time-In parenting fosters a foundation for long-term relationship building between parents and children. By prioritizing connection, understanding, and teaching, parents lay the groundwork for ongoing communication and support throughout the child's development. This can contribute to a strong and resilient parent-child bond as the child grows into adolescence and adulthood.

CONS OF TIME-IN:

- **Time-consuming:** Time-In requires a significant investment of time and energy from parents (or caregivers) to address emotional dysregulation and behavioral outbursts. It takes tremendous time and emotional energy to find calmness repeatedly, share that calmness with a dysregulated child, followed by meaningful discussions, and then repeat this the next day. Time-in is not a quick fix, and it can be challenging to find the time and energy for these interactions, especially during busy or stressful periods of life.
- **Lack of Immediate resolution:** In situations where immediate consequences are necessary, Time-In might not provide an immediate resolution—because it focuses on teaching emotional regulation rather than immediate changes in behavior.
- **Emotional strain:** Time-In can be emotionally challenging for parents, particularly when dealing with repeated misbehavior or difficult behavioral issues that require ongoing discussions and guidance. Staying calm when a child is dysregulated is one of the hardest things for a parent to do—often made more difficult by previous patterns of suppressing their feelings when they were a child!

- Difficulty identifying root causes of the child's distress: Understanding the underlying reasons for a child's dysregulation can be difficult to ascertain (especially for younger children). Children may not always recognize why they are upset—their outbursts may have been triggered by an unpleasant event that occurred hours ago. It might require careful observation, effective communication, and sometimes trial and error to identify the root causes of the misbehavior. This process can be challenging, especially if the child struggles to articulate their emotions or their behaviors are influenced by external factors.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, please listen to these bible verses in the context of what we have been learning and practicing today regarding how a parent should respond to a dysregulated child:

Luke 6:38

Give, and it will be given to you: good measure, pressed down, shaken together, and running over will be put into your bosom. For with the same measure that you use, it will be measured back to you.

Philippians 4:6

“Be anxious for nothing, but in everything by prayer and supplication, with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God.”

Proverbs 22:6

“Train up a child in the way he should go, And when he is old he will not depart from it.”

Psalms 103:13

“As a father pities *his* children, So the LORD pities those who fear Him.”

Galatians 5:22-23

“But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. Against such there is no law.”

1 Peter 5:2-3

“Shepherd the flock of God which is among you, serving as overseers, not by compulsion but willingly, not for dishonest gain but eagerly; nor as being lords over those entrusted to you, but being examples to the flock.”

Proverbs 25:15

“By long forbearance a ruler is persuaded, And a gentle tongue breaks a bone.”

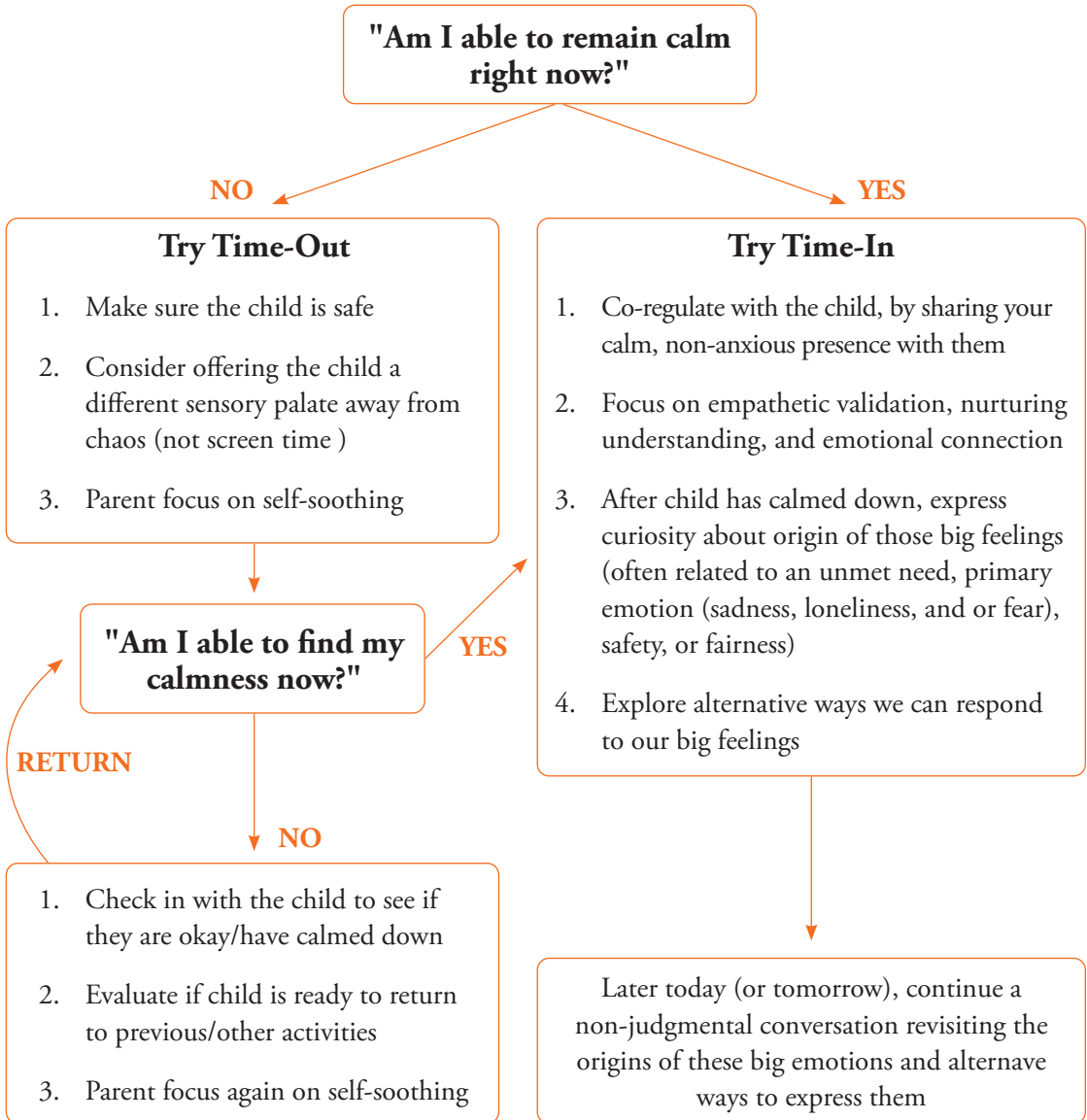
POTENTIAL ONLINE RESOURCES TO CONSIDER

- <https://www.parenthelp.org.nz/time-in/>
- <https://hes-extraordinary.com/time-in-vs-time-out>
- <https://www.traumaresourceinstitute.com/ichill>
- <https://nurtureandthriveblog.com/feeling-break-time-in/>
- <https://onetimethrough.com/time-in-a-positive-alternative-to-time-out/>
- <http://ndl.ethernet.edu.et/bitstream/123456789/22728/1/172.pdf#page=64>
- <https://time.com/5700473/time-outs-science/#:~:text=Unlike%20a%20time%2Dout%2C%20which,same%20room%20with%20a%20parent>

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FIGURE 1



Dr. Cafferky's Time-Out or Time-In Decision Tree for Parents Responding to Dysregulated Children

MANAGING DIFFERENCES IN THE FAMILY

BY ALINA M. BALTAZAR

THE TEXTS

Genesis 1:27

I Corinthians 12:13

Colossians 3:11

Romans 12:16

Galatians 5:14

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

This seminar aims to help the audience better understand differences within the family and how to manage any conflict that may arise from these differences, especially concerning modern societal issues. This seminar also addresses how to improve empathy and communication skills that may help resolve conflict related to these challenges.

MATERIALS NEEDED

Laptop, projector or large Smart TV, PowerPoint software

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DIFFERENCES IN THE FAMILY

Human beings are all different. Everyone was created in the image of God, so our differences reflect the beautiful dimensions of our creator. “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created him.” Genesis 1:27. People differ in many ways: personality, age, hair color, eye color, height, hair texture, gender, skin color, interests, abilities, sexual attraction, physical and mental health, limitations, body size/type, opinions, etc. Look around at your family and you will see several of these human variations. Many of these differences are biological, and some can be influenced by the environment and life experiences.

Our cultures often value some of these characteristics over others. In some cultures, certain body types are valued over others, whereas another culture could be the opposite in the type of body that is valued. As a result, some children may look down on others and other children internalize those lower opinions of themselves.

This can lead to conflict in the family. We may treat certain members of the family poorly due to their perceived lower value in society. Those who aren't treated well may act out or withdraw from the family all together, which can reinforce some of those low opinions of the other person.

One of the roles of parents is to talk about these differences to lessen the harm that can happen to a developing child's self-esteem and to improve empathy for those who are different from themselves. These conversations aren't always easy. It starts by developing a close relationship when our children are young. When there is a close relationship, kids feel like they can talk to their parents about difficult topics and know they won't feel judged (Baltazar, Dessie, & McBride, 2020)

Empathy is a great way to smooth over problematic differences in the family. In a sinful world, empathy does not develop naturally. Parents play a powerful role in children developing empathy. Harvard University (2023) has a Making Caring Common project that has shared the following tips to cultivate empathy in children.

1. **Empathize with your child and model empathy for others.** When a child experiences the benefits of empathy, they will want others to have those benefits as well. Once we empathize with our children, it helps them develop trust in others and have a more secure attachment with their parents. This can be done by being aware of our children's physical and emotional needs and understanding and respecting differences in themselves. If there is a closer attachment between parent and child, they are more likely to internalize the values they are taught. If there is closer attachment and we role model empathy towards others, children are more likely to emulate that behavior.
2. **Make caring for others a priority and set high ethical expectations.** Kids need to hear from their parents that caring for others is a top priority. Think about what Jesus teaches, “And the second is like it: ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself.’” (Matthew 22:39,) which was originally an instruction from God to the new Israelite nation in Leviticus 19:18. This is a big part of the Christian faith.

3. **Provide opportunities for children to practice empathy.** God created us with an innate capacity for empathy, but like sharing, it needs to be nurtured and given opportunities to be practiced. When children complain about a peer or sibling, parents can help their child understand the other person's perspective and why they may have acted a certain way. A great way to develop empathy skills is to volunteer in the community, especially if they can work with a diverse group of people to address community problems.
4. **Expand your child's circle of concern.** It is easy to have empathy for our family and friends. Jesus challenged his followers to "love your enemies, do good to those who hate you." Luke 6:27. It begins with really listening to other people's stories. Origin stories are popular in modern entertainment. Every human has an origin to their behavior, good or bad. Many bullies were either bullied themselves or abused in their homes.
5. **Help children develop self-control and manage feelings effectively.** It is also important to keep in mind that what often blocks children from showing empathy towards others is their own negative emotions. It is hard to think of others when we are angry, ashamed, or envious. Helping children learn how to manage these emotions will release them to be able to have empathy towards others.
 - This begins by helping our children be aware of and identify problematic emotions. It helps to be cognizant of where and how we feel certain emotions in our bodies. It is easier to notice physical sensations before we are aware of strong emotions. For example, some feel anger as a burning in their stomach. When these sensations are noticed, it is time to activate coping tools to manage the emotion.
 - Another way to manage negative emotions is to slow our breathing down to increase calm. Generally, these exercises begin with breathing in through the nose slowly, holding our breath for a bit, and then breathing out even more slowly through our mouth, like breathing out through a straw. A way to remember this is to breathe in for four seconds, hold for six seconds, then breathe out for eight seconds. This may seem unnatural at first, so it helps to do it before a distressing situation, like during slightly stressful times throughout the day. Let's practice this exercise now.
 - A great breathing exercise for kids is "pizza breathing." Most kids love pizza and how it smells. So have your child pretend they are holding a piece of pizza in their hand and then breathe in the wonderful smells through their nose, but then pretend the pizza is too hot, so they need to blow on it to cool down. Let's practice this exercise now.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Think back to when you were a teen. What was the best part about that time in your life?
- What were some of the challenges you faced during that time?

- Was there anything your parents did or said to you that was helpful during your teen years?
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HOW TO TALK SO YOUR TEEN WILL LISTEN AND LISTEN SO YOUR TEEN WILL TALK

Adolescence can be a challenging time for many parents because this is a time when teens are working on developing their identity. They are deciding what parts of your teachings they will internalize, fitting them into their unique personality in a world different from the ones their parents grew up in.

This can lead to conflict between parents and teens when a teen starts to experiment with or take on an identity the parent(s) disagree with and are afraid it may lead to a path of destruction physically and/or spiritually. Though teens are increasingly turning to their peers and media for guidance, parents still play a powerful role. Parents often don't know how to approach their teen, who seems resistant to any guidance, or how to avoid a teen thinking they are being judged or disrespected.

DISCUSSION QUESTION

Let's explore ways we are almost guaranteed to turn most kids off. Get into a discussion group and think of some typical scenarios you have had with your kids and identify ways you have or think you would get a negative response.

The authors of the well-known book *How to Talk So Kids Will Listen & Listen So Kids Will Talk* also wrote a book specific for parents of teens (Faber & Mazlich, 2005). These authors give guidance on six approaches that will help parents communicate better with teens.

1. **Deal with feelings.** Instead of dismissing feelings, acknowledge them. When a teen seems distressed, help them identify the thoughts behind those emotions and what emotions are being expressed at that moment. It is good to acknowledge those feelings and verbalize an understanding of why they may feel that way. You don't have to agree with them.
 - Try to correct any incorrect thoughts they may be having by asking questions to help them think it through on their own. Here is a technique from Cognitive Behavioral Therapy to address incorrect thoughts without the other person getting defensive (Beck, 2011). In a situation where a teen thinks her friends "hate her," ask,
 - "Where did this idea come from (*the evidence*)?"
 - "Is there any evidence that your friends really do like you (*evidence against*)?"
 - "Is there an *alternative explanation* for your friend's behavior?"

- “*What if they really don’t like you, what can you do?*”
 - “*What would you say to a friend in this same situation?*”
 - Then try redirecting their attention to something else that could improve their mood.
2. **Getting a teenager’s cooperation.** Instead of ordering a teen to do or not do something, you can;
 - Describe the problem.
 - Share how you feel about the problem.
 - Give information as to why you believe it is a problem.
 - Offer a choice to decrease the possibility of butting heads.
 - Clearly state your beliefs and expectations so they better understand your perspective.
 3. **To punish or not to punish.** Grounding is a common way to punish a teenager, and sometimes that is appropriate if they are irresponsible with a privilege, they should lose that privilege for a specific period of time. When that doesn’t fit “the crime,” there can be other approaches to try.
 - The parent should begin by stating their feelings about the situation. This may appeal to the teen’s empathy they learned when young.
 - Clearly state expectations for their behavior and how their current behavior is not meeting those expectations.
 - Give them a choice on how they should make amends for the mistake.
 4. **Working it out together.** A parent may think a teen’s behavior is a problem that a teen doesn’t feel is an issue, such as a messy room. A good approach is to;
 - Invite your teen to give his/her point of view,
 - State your point of view
 - Invite your teenager to brainstorm with you to solve the problem by writing down all of the ideas,
 - Review the list and decide the best option you both can agree on.
 5. **Get to know your teen.** Try having a conversation with your teenager to better understand their perspective and what it is like being a teen these days. Some suggestions include (Faber & Mazlish, 2005, p. 118-122);
 - *What do you think is the best part of being your age either for you or your friends?*
 - *What are some of the things kids your age worry about?*
 - *Is there anything parents do that is helpful to teens?*
 - *Is there anything parents do or say that is unhelpful?*
 - *If you could give advice to parents, what would it be?*
 - *If you could give advice to other teenagers, what would it be?*
 - *What do you wish could be different about your life at home, in school, or with friends?*
 6. **Healthy expression.** It is important to express our concerns and appreciation towards our teens and for them to do that to us, but some ways may lead to better outcomes.
 - *When expressing concerns,* the teen or parents should say how they feel about the situation and then say what they would like/need and/or expect instead.

- *When expressing praise or appreciation*, describe what the person did and how that makes you feel.

HOW TO TALK ABOUT DIFFICULT ISSUES

We may often think we have to choose a side that is the opposite of someone else. In reality, both sides may want the same thing, and they just have different ideas on how to get them. We have more in common than we realize. Generally, all humans want love, acceptance, safety, and freedom. As Christians, we want to show we love and care for others. Based on our culture and personal experience, we develop different ideas on how to get these desires met. When these differences lead to conflict in the family, it helps to really listen to the need or desire behind what the person is saying. Try to avoid taking offense at what is being said, be cordial instead.

There may be times when you genuinely believe the other person is wrong. It helps to state the facts, realizing they may disagree with the reliability of those facts. How many Christians question the reliability of evolutionary science? Citing Bible verses may not help either. Some Christians doubt the reliability of the Bible, thinking a book that old has changed so much from the original that it is no longer accurate, that it was only applicable to the culture of the time and place it was written, or those who wrote the Bible didn't understand enough about human behavior or the brain.

It helps to ask questions to understand the other person's perspective better. Doing so may help them see the error of their thinking without being embarrassed over their erroneous thinking. Remember what the Bible says, "Be of the same mind toward one another. Do not set your mind on high things, but associate with the humble. Do not be wise in your own opinion." Romans 12:16 We all have things we can learn from each other.

Look for what you do agree on and build from there. If you still sincerely believe the other person is in the wrong, but they refuse to see it, you don't need to end the relationship. For your own spiritual sake, you may have to distance yourself from the other person, though. Continue to pray for the other person and your relationship with them.

Resolving differences without hurting the other person's feelings can be challenging, thus damaging the relationship. As a result, we often avoid talking about problems, or we just don't express ourselves directly. There are ways to communicate our needs without making the other person defensive.

- *Aggressive communication* clearly states the issue but does so without regard to the other person's feelings. This can lead to defensiveness or resentment.
- *Passive communication* avoids conflict but can also lead to resentment when the distressed partner doesn't get their needs met.
- *Passive aggressive communication* is a combination of them, where one person lets the other person know something is wrong without clearly stating the actual issue. This can also lead to resentment in the passive-aggressive communicator when they aren't understood and

frustration by the receiving party since they often don't know what they did wrong or how to correct the problem.

- *Assertive communication* is the best way to approach discussing difficult family issues. As mentioned earlier, talking about feelings is a way to express ourselves without offending the other person since the issue is often not about the other person but about the person's feelings about the situation. Here is an example of an assertive communication script that may be challenging to follow at first but will become more natural with practice.
 - "I feel _____." First, we need to know what our feelings are. Psychologists vary on what our core emotions are, but generally, when we are upset about something, we are experiencing some variation of disgust, sadness, anger, or fear.
 - Do not say, "I feel that _____" That is an opinion, not a feeling. It can cause the person to get defensive, which can then escalate to conflict.
 - "About _____" Describe what you are concerned about without using the word "you" if possible. The other person isn't necessarily the problem, but the situation is.
 - "Because _____" Why is this situation causing you distress? How have childhood or past experiences led to your beliefs about the situation?
 - "I need _____" Clearly state what the other person can do to help you with the problematic situation. When you request assistance from the other person, it can lead to a more positive response. The other person may not be able to meet that need the way you are requesting, so then be willing to negotiate where both parties are more likely to get their needs met.

In a situation where a wife is upset at her husband for inviting friends over without checking in with her first, an assertive conversation will go like this; "I feel disregarded when friends are brought over without checking with me first because it reminds me when my parents wouldn't listen to me when I tried telling them I didn't want to do something. I need you to check in with me before you invite people over."

APPLICATION EXERCISE

Now practice assertive communication. Think of a regular point of conflict with a family member that you would like to improve your communication around. Either write down what you would say using the script presented or practice with the person you came with or someone else you'd feel comfortable with. The other person should try to take on the role of that other person, guessing how someone would react. Work on your negotiation skills. If you aren't comfortable talking about a personal issue, then choose a more generic point of conflict common within families.

WHAT TO DO WHEN CONFLICT ESCALATES

Sometimes, conflict escalates very quickly, and both parties are not thinking clearly enough to resolve their conflict without causing harm to the other person and/or the relationship. When individuals get flooded with strong emotions, it can be hard to think clearly enough to be able to resolve the conflict. It is important to recognize that the conflict has gotten out of hand and know when to walk away.

Generally, in the average person, when their pulse is over 100 beats per minute when arguing, they may not be able to think clearly enough to resolve the conflict. Nowadays, with so many people wearing smart watches or fitness tracking devices on their wrists, it is easy to check pulse rates. If not, think about how and where you feel distress in your body when you “lose it .” That is the time to walk away. When one person walks away from conflict, it can cause the other person to feel they are being abandoned or what they are trying to say is being disregarded, so it helps to plan ahead.

Give yourself some time to calm down. Preferably at least 20 minutes, up to 24 hours, but it shouldn't be longer than that, according to Dr. John Gottman, a well-known couple researcher (Gottman & Gottman, 2014). During that time, avoid thinking about the situation because it can make you even more upset. Think ahead of time about what types of things help you calm down after a fight. Then, when in a calmer mood, come back to resolve the conflict. It helps to realize that according to Dr. Gottman's research, 70% of couple issues are unresolvable, so most of the time, you will not be able to resolve the issue completely, but you can at least come to some sort of agreement.

Christians often think they shouldn't go to bed angry, so they may feel conflict has to be resolved before going to sleep. The later the fight goes into the night, the harder it will be to resolve the problem. The people involved in the conflict can agree to resolve the problem the next day after getting some rest. It may be harder to sleep, so pray for the Lord's guidance to resolve the conflict. The main point is not to let anger continue and fester.

CONCLUSION

God created humanity in his image. The differences we see in society are a reflection of God in us. We are all His children, part of the family of God. The Bible reminds us, “For by one Spirit we were all baptized into one body – whether Jews or Greeks, whether slaves or free – and have all been made to drink into one Spirit.” I Corinthians 12:13

Conflict within the family is inevitable in a sinful world. There are some societal issues that are intensifying these challenges. The Lord has given us guidance in the Bible and direction through others with expertise in these areas. Remember, we have more in common than we realize. These issues are not new; there were differences in the early Christian church too. “Where there is neither Greek nor Jew, circumcised nor uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave nor free, but Christ is all and in all.” Colossians 3:11

God has called us to share the good news of salvation through His son, Jesus Christ. Who will listen to that good news if it isn't shared out of love?

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