

lesson seven

MAY 11–17

Keys to Family **Unity**

*“ That they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me,
and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the
world may believe that You sent Me’ ”*

(John 17:21, NKJV).



A family walks along a beach. Christ calls His church His bride, wanting to be joined as a husband and wife, just as He is with His Father.

John 17:21

Introduction

Family Unity in a Divided World

"When a couple asked a pastor if he would perform their marriage ceremony, he proceeded to tell them that he likes to give several sessions of pre-marital counseling before performing weddings. To which they replied, 'We don't need counseling. We've both been married several times before.'"¹

This is the age of self-help and a do-it-yourself mentality. We feel that at times we are immune to issues and problems that cross our path. We think we have answers when really they will just add to the issues before us. Could it be, then, that we are self-deceived? That we have become wise in our own eyes?

As we draw nearer and nearer to the coming of Jesus, the influences of

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this sinful world will continue to invade not only our beloved church but our homes and marriages as well. Satan is doing his best to destroy the family unit through divorce, and by doing so, he wants to perpetuate these problems with the succeeding generations in order to destroy the family unit and take our eyes off of Jesus.

When the Israelites left Egypt, Moses warned them that, while God is gracious and merciful, God would not excuse willful disobedience against Him and that transgressions would plague their children, their children's children, and their children as well (cf. Exod. 20:5, 6; Num. 14:18, 19). Did the Israelites heed these admonitions? No, they didn't, and their disobedience became very evident.

We have much to learn here on earth and more when we get to our heavenly home. God's ways are always the best, yet we have strayed from these. When Adam and Eve ate of the forbidden fruit, they found themselves outside the Garden of Eden. Soon the results of that bite of fruit showed up in Cain's choice of sacrificial offering, which eventually led to polygamy. All these choices compounded to greatly affect the family members and the choices they made.

Even though you may not be married yet, you have probably been affected one way or another by your parents' choices or by choices that your siblings have made. If you are married, you are most likely doing all you can to keep your spouse and children unified amid the chaos, temptations, and distractions that Satan is throwing your way.

This week, we will study how to keep the family together and united. Paul said that we can do all things through Christ (Phil. 4:13), so keep your eyes fixed on Him!

1. *Reader's Digest*, May 2009.

Logos

A Family of Faith

Matt. 16:24;
Luke 12:15–21;
Rom. 5:12

The Original Human Family (Gen. 1:26, 27; 2:15–24)

Before sin entered our world, there was perfect harmony and unity in the Garden of Eden. Humanity was created in the image of God and perfectly reflected that image in all aspects of life (Gen. 1:26, 27). One of the few remaining institutions that existed before sin is the institution of marriage and the development of the family unit. When God formed Adam, He spent time with him, defining his work (Gen. 2:15, 19, 20), his diet (Gen. 2:16, 17), and his relationships (Gen. 2:21, 22).

Although our first parents fell, God has been trying to bless every family.

When Adam awoke from his deep sleep, he spoke in inspirational poetry. In his brief description of his wife, Adam described her value and association to him and the world. She was to be his helper, which is not to suggest that she was inferior, for God is even called our helper. This new creation was *ke negdo* (Hebrew): her own individual, unique, yet equal to Adam because they looked face to face with each other. He finished his introduction of his wife by describing what every future family will look like. The relationship is to be exclusive, permanent, and intimate (Gen. 2:24). Lastly, we learn that this new pair is to be united—“one flesh.”

Imperfect Families

By the time Adam and Eve had their first child, sin had entered the world. Our world had already experienced the results of distance from the presence of God (Gen. 3:24). Sin became the ultimate family separator (Isa. 59:2). And disunity with God brought about disunity with each other—blame would take the place of blessing (Gen. 3:12, 13). Life would never be the same as it had been in the Garden of Eden, and the results clearly have been seen. Humanity turned from worshiping the Creator to worshiping the created (Rom. 1:23). Now, every family has experienced the results of that first turning away from God. For example, consider Cain and Abel, Isaac and Ishmael, Jacob and Esau, the twelve sons of Jacob/Israel, Hophni and Phinehas, and the sons of David. Note also the numerous proverbs that deal with family relationships.

Blessed Families

God's desire was to bless all families of the earth. Although the world was imperfect and filled with imperfect families, He intended that

through the Abrahamic line He would bless all families (Gen. 12:1–3; 28:14). We see this idea reinforced through the multiple promises God made “for the sake of David” (1 Kings 11; 2 Kings 8; 19; 20; Isa. 37:35). Ultimately, however, humanity would bear the image of man and become subject to death (1 Cor. 15:46–49). Although our first parents fell, God has been trying to bless every family. His way of doing this is by restoring in humanity the once perfect image of Himself. He knows that if this is done, we would have families that live like they are in heaven. They would reflect the oneness of the perfect family in heaven.

Jesus—the Family Unifier

Where, then, can the human family find hope? Although we are all subject to death because of Adam, we all have hope because of Jesus (1 Cor. 15:18–22). When Jesus walked on earth, He was tempted to sin like each of us is tempted, yet He did not sin (Heb. 4:15). He perfectly reflected the image of God. He “is the image of the invisible God” (Col. 1:15). How can we bring the image of God into our families? Only through the gospel that penetrates the heart of those who believe can we reflect the image of God again (2 Cor. 4:4). Jesus, “who being the brightness of his glory, and express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, . . . had by himself purged our sins” (Heb. 1:3). In fact, Paul, before speaking to husbands and wives in Colossians, precedes his statements by talking about conversion through Jesus. He specifically says that humanity can be “renewed in knowledge after the image of him that created him” (Col. 3:10).

Paul repeats this method when writing to the Ephesians. According to him, a renewed person will reflect a “new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness” (Eph. 4:23, 24). He is a child of the light and bares the fruit of the Spirit in all “goodness and righteousness and truth” (Eph. 5:8, 9). After explaining the need for conversion, Paul goes on to describe how husbands and wives are to live in verses 22–33 and how parents are to govern their homes in Ephesians 6:1–9.

It is our destiny to be “conformed to the image of His Son” (Rom. 8:29). As we behold the glory of the Lord, we are “changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord” (2 Cor. 3:18). Jesus then becomes the ultimate family unifier. He set the example in an imperfect world that love can overcome hate, that light can transcend darkness, and that peace can overcome war.

REACT

1. What aspects of my family hinder my relationship with Jesus? What aspects of my family aid my relationship with Jesus?
2. How can I reflect the image of God within my own family?

Testimony

Love Is Spoken Here

Eph. 2:11–22

“If pride and selfishness were laid aside, five minutes would remove most difficulties.”¹

How many times do we dig our heels into the ground in an argument simply because of pride? Even if we are not wrong, most arguments could be de-escalated quickly and family unity preserved by humbling ourselves and offering apologies for our un-Christlike behavior.

“The husband and wife should be all to each other.”

“There is a sacred circle around every family which should be preserved. No other one has any right in that sacred circle. The husband and wife should be all to each other. The wife should have no secrets to keep from her husband and let others know, and the husband should have no secrets to keep from his wife to relate to others. The heart of his wife should be the grave for the faults of the husband, and the heart of the husband the grave for his wife’s faults. Never should either party indulge in a joke at the expense of the other’s feelings. Never should either the husband or wife in sport or in any other manner complain of each other to others, for frequently indulging in this foolish and what may seem perfectly harmless joking will end in trial with each other and perhaps estrangement. I have been shown that there should be a sacred shield around every family.”²

The family is a sacred place, and love should be the ruling power. Remember, money is not power in the Adventist home; love is. This is how we can keep family unity.

“The greatest evidence of the power of Christianity that can be presented to the world is a well-ordered, well-disciplined family. This will recommend the truth as nothing else can, for it is a living witness of its practical power upon the heart.”³ How many unbelievers could be won to the truth simply by a genuine Seventh-day Adventist family?

REACT

1. How important is preserving family unity?
2. In what ways can we, as families, conduct our family unity to be a witness to unbelievers? See *The Adventist Home*, page 32.

1. Ellen G. White, *Early Writings*, p. 119.

2. Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 177.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

Eph. 5:22–33

Evidence

Inferior or Submissive

In Ephesians 5:22, Paul instructs wives to submit to their husbands as unto the Lord. Many today are confused about the word *submit*. *Submit* had Greek connotations, meaning “to arrange in a military fashion under the command of a leader” as well as “a voluntary attitude of giving in, cooperating, assuming responsibility, and carrying a burden.”¹ Yet with the rise of radical feminism and unbalanced women’s rights movements, submission is made out to be a weakness and considered inferior. As a result, the hierarchy of the home has become blurred and the roles of gender confused. Now women are no longer fighting just for equality, but for superiority.

Many today are confused about the word *submit*.

In Genesis 2, God made Eve as a “help meet” for Adam. But since the fall of humanity in Genesis 3, Satan has tried to destroy the family unit by destroying the model God created. This model shows up again in Ephesians 5:23, “For the husband is the head of the wife, even as Christ is the head of the church: and he is the saviour of the body.”

In the following verses, the church is paralleled by the family. The wife is synonymous with the church, and the husband synonymous with Jesus. Jesus is the Head of the church just as the husband is the head of the household. If Jesus is not the Head of the church, something is amiss. Jesus is the Foundation, the Cornerstone, the Head. If the husband is not the head of the family, then something is amiss in the house as well.

Submit is not a bad word. Instead, it was ordained by God in Genesis. Husbands need to lead; wives need to submit. Successful marriages would resume if the biblical model were followed.

Editors’ note: Ephesians 5:21 introduces submission bilaterally, then 5:22 adds that submission must not be mindless and foolish deference but “as unto the Lord.” A wife’s first loyalty is to the Lord, whom she is ultimately serving.

Additionally, husbands are not to abuse this responsibility; their leadership is modeled “even as Christ also loved the church, and gave himself for it” (Eph. 5:25). These verses are not advocating for a license of abuse. Rather, they paint a picture of devoted humility and servant leadership encased in Christian love. May all Christian marriages reflect this beloved example of Christ.

REACT

How does individuality manifest amidst submission?

1. “Lexicon :: Strong’s G5293 – hypotassō,” Blue Letter Bible, <https://www.blueletterbible.org/lang/lexicon/lexicon.cfm?Strong=G5293&t=KJV>.

How-to
*Christ, the Open Door
to Family Unity*

Col. 1:21–23;
1 John 3:16–18

God created the first family with the purpose of enlarging His heavenly family. Because our first parents sinned, we inherited a fallen nature. Selfishness took its place in the heart of humanity. This hindered the Master's plan and brought disunity within our homes. Because of that, we see a lot of disturbed and broken relationships. Our fallen nature makes all of us face difficulties in raising our children.

**God has a plan to restore unity within our borders,
but to make it work, we must cooperate.**

The family was always the primary aim of Satan's attacks. Families are the backbone of the church. Satan knows that if he succeeds in destroying the families, the church will suffer. Disunity will destabilize our homes and also the church. Without unity, the church and the families cannot fulfill their mission. Our church family is growing fast, so pressing together becomes increasingly important. God has a plan to restore unity within our borders, but to make it work, we must cooperate. Here is His plan:

Pray daily for the presence of Christ in our homes and church. Christ walked the different stages of life, and because of that, He's able to help us out when we face these life challenges (Heb. 2:18). He has the ability through the Holy Spirit to destroy the body of sin, the selfishness within us (Rom. 7:14–25). The presence of Christ alone can make men and women happy. All the common waters of life Christ can turn into the wine of heaven.

Ask daily for the mind-set of Jesus; the spirit of love and compassion toward others (Phil. 2:3–5). Often we treat the people who are close to us the worst. Practical Christianity is what our families, the church, and this suffering world need. We start within our homes, the place where destruction started. The Spirit of Christ manifested in our lives will then unite and enable us to accomplish the great work of giving the last warning to the world.

Go daily with faith through the open door. Be submissive and follow the instructions of the Good Shepherd. In our striving for unity within the church and our families, the Word of God must be the foundation of all truth (Eph. 2:20). God's Word "is profitable . . . for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16) and is the only source that contains medicine against evil. The Good Shepherd will lead to green pastures, a place of rest and safety.

REACT

What can you contribute toward unity within your family and within the church?

Luc Brank, Fruemsens, Switzerland

John 17:22;
Acts 2:1

Opinion

That They All May Be One

Two thousand years ago, when Jesus Christ walked this earth, there were divisions among the people based on ethnicity, religion, and class. There were divisions among the disciples and early believers, but Jesus prayed to the Father on their behalf that they all might be one, just as He and the Father are one (John 17:20–23).

This prayer was answered on the Day of the Pentecost when the disciples were gathered with one accord and were anointed by the Holy Spirit and specially equipped to go into all the world and preach the gospel in different languages. God wants our families to be united, just as the disciples were.

There were divisions among the disciples and early believers.

“When you see geese heading south for the winter, flying in their familiar ‘V’ formation, you might be interested in knowing why they fly that way. Science has learned that, as each bird flaps its wings, it creates an uplift for the bird immediately behind it. By flying in a ‘V’ formation, the flock together gains over 70% more flying range than if each bird flew on its own.

“Like the geese, people who share a common direction and a sense of community can get where they are going quicker and easier, because they are traveling on the thrust of one another.”¹ Families that are in unity are an effective witness for Christ.

Two thousand years later we have similar, if not more, divisions based on everything from politics to religion. The command of God remains the same—to be united in faith and to preach the everlasting gospel to every nation. As we overcome these divisions and distractions and unite in the faith and in the knowledge of Jesus Christ, we will receive the latter rain so that together we will be equipped with the power of the Holy Spirit to have a greater range in taking the three angels’ messages to all the nations of this earth. Our purpose in this world will be completed, and we can go home to be with our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ. Imagine if we did that together as families!

REACT

1. How can your family live and work to minister to those among you who are “far off” and “without Christ”?
2. Can you think of instances in the Old Testament where God blessed His people when they were “one” in Him?

1. Author unknown, “The Goose Story,” accessed July 11, 2018, http://familieslead.org/files/7614/1175/6396/Lessons_from_the_Geese.pdf.

Exploration

Living in Truth and Love

Eph. 4:2

CONCLUDE

As we have been studying family unity throughout the week, family unity is based on truth and love (cf. Exod. 20:12). Within the law, we see the importance of the child honoring the father and mother. It is one of the last six commandments that express our love for others. And the Word speaks of the law of God as truth in Psalm 119:151. Love and truth bring true success to family unity.

CONSIDER

- Memorizing Matthew 22:37–39 and repeating it in your head.
- Sharing the present truth with your family members who are unfamiliar with it.
- Going on Facebook or any social media site that encourages family unity to see how you could help those around you.
- Printing tracts centered on family, love, and/or the law and distributing them to your friends or coworkers.
- Singing Scripture songs with your family as the Sabbath begins.
- Praying to ask God to give you a loving, powerful relationship with your family.

CONNECT

Deuteronomy 6:6, 7; Acts 16:31; 1 Corinthians 13:4.

Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, chaps. 1–3; *An Appeal to Mothers*; *An Appeal to the Youth*.