

What Have They Seen in Your **House?**

“But you are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, His own special people, that you may proclaim the praises of Him who called you out of darkness into His marvelous light” (1 Pet. 2:9, NKJV).



The hand that knocks on the door of our hearts belongs to Christ. Will we let Him change the things that need to be changed in our lives?

Introduction

Doorbell Christianity

Gen. 18:1-8

Hot. That was the only word to describe the day. Samuel looked across the afternoon sky, but there was no relief in sight. Hot, hot, hot.

He gazed up at yet another house. Time to ring the doorbell. As his finger pushed the button, his attitude immediately changed into one of enthusiasm and interest. A short, stout woman answered the door.

“Hello! My name is Samuel, and I would like to show you—”

“Why, hello! Come on in! You must be hot!” she exclaimed.

Samuel had been cursed at, lectured to, and given the cold shoulder.

“Thank you very much! I can’t wait to tell you about my vacuum cleaners!” Samuel responded with relief. He entered the doorway and overheard two children arguing. One started crying, and the woman bellowed, “Ya’ll keep quiet in there, ya hear?” The crying escalated into screaming. “Excuse me,” she said.

Samuel covered his ears to keep out the yells and screams. The woman returned presently.

“Now, what do we have here?” she asked. Samuel proceeded to tell and then demonstrate his state-of-the-art vacuum cleaner amid yelling back and forth between the woman and the children. Somewhere in the cacophony, he heard a man’s booming voice too. Samuel grew increasingly uneasy as the tension in the house mounted.

“I’ll take one!” the woman said. The man’s voice hollered back, “No, you won’t!” After even more debate, the deal was sealed as quickly as possible (on Samuel’s part), and Samuel made a mad dash for the door.

“Come again soon!” the woman said with a friendly smile. *No way!* Samuel thought to himself. Several doorbells later, Samuel had been cursed at, lectured to, and given the cold shoulder. He was merely selling vacuums. A simple “No, thank you” would suffice for those not interested.

Brrrrring! The doorbell sounded through the house, but no one answered, yet again. As Samuel turned to leave, the door opened quickly.

“I’m so sorry I took so long to answer!” a younger woman apologized. “Please come in. I was just taking cookies out of the oven. Would you like some?” This home was different from the other homes. There was a peace and a calm he hadn’t felt all day. No rudeness. No yelling. Although the family didn’t buy anything, Samuel left the house joyful and refreshed.

What would he have encountered at your house?

Genesis 33;
1 Pet. 2:9

Evidence *Being God's Example Starts at Home*

The most important mission Jesus ever gave us was to paint a picture of Him to the world. He wants us to be His hands and feet. He longs for us to exude His character and His love in everything we say and do. As 1 Peter 2:9 says, we were “chosen to tell about the wonderful acts of God” (NCV). But as we look back on our lives, have we been the examples He wanted us to be—not only to strangers but to our own families, as well?

Getting along with the closest people in our lives can be difficult at times.

For most of us, the answer is probably no. We might be examples when we leave the house, but those examples seem to fade the second we get home. We begin to treat our family members with contempt instead of love. You've heard the saying that “charity begins at home,” but have you ever thought that perhaps being examples for God starts there as well? If people came to your house, would they see evidence of God's presence, or would they leave thinking He wasn't there at all?

Getting along with the closest people in our lives can be difficult at times. But in order for others to witness God's love in our homes, we need to show that love and care to our families first. Jacob's experience with his brother Esau is a good example to study. Their relationship is one of the most complicated ones in the entire Bible. It is safe to say that they didn't get along very well, and when Jacob stole Esau's birthright, their relationship suffered a great deal. Being estranged for years makes what happens in Genesis 33 even more powerful. In verse three, we find Jacob bowing “down flat on the ground seven times as he was walking toward his brother” (Gen. 33:3, NCV). In bowing down seven times, Jacob shows Esau a respect that he had failed to show his brother years earlier. It is a lesson about humility and repentance in family relationships to bring reconciliation.

Humility is the beginning of a love that should shine through every corner of our homes. We don't want to be accused of being two-faced liars—of claiming to be Christians in public but hypocrites at home. So strive to be like Jacob, whose humility saved his relationship with his brother.

REACT

1. In what ways can you show love to your family members so that your homes will radiate God's presence?
2. Have you ever experienced a strained relationship with any of your siblings? If so, how did you deal with it?

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Logos

Is There Anyone in the Kingdom Because of What They Saw in My House?

Ruth 1;
2 Chron. 32:25, 31;
Isaiah 38; 39

Pride Destroys a Witness (2 Chron. 32:25, 31; Isa. 38; 39)

King Hezekiah faced a sentence of death. According to 2 Chronicles 32, the sickness that brought him near the grave happened after a miraculous military victory over the indomitable Assyrians and the exceedingly prideful King Sennacherib. Verse 23 states, “And many brought gifts to the LORD at Jerusalem, and presents to Hezekiah king of Judah, so that he was exalted in the sight of all nations thereafter” (NKJV). This exaltation may have contributed to a giant pride problem.

What did Ruth see in Naomi’s house?

Regardless, God performed another miracle, healing Hezekiah and giving him fifteen more years of life (Isa. 38:5). Yet what did Hezekiah do with his new lease on life? How did he use the treasures, abundance, and accomplishments God blessed him with (cf. 2 Chron. 32:27–30)? Second Chronicles 32:31 states that God allowed Babylonian princes, from the most powerful nation on earth, to come calling on Hezekiah. This diplomatic visit was Hezekiah’s best opportunity to testify about the God who had blessed him and sent His angel to rout the mighty Assyrian army. “However, regarding the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon . . . , God withdrew from him, in order to test him, that He might know all that was in his heart” (NKJV). How well did this visit go?

From a diplomatic standpoint, the situation was a great advantage for God’s people; however, God wasn’t as concerned with that. The prophet Isaiah came calling, in Isaiah 39, to ask the penultimate question: “What have they seen in your house?” So Hezekiah answered, “. . . there is nothing among my treasures that I have not shown them” (Isa. 39:4, NKJV). But what of the treasure laid up in heaven?

Isaiah next prophesied that all of Hezekiah’s treasures, even his sons, would be carted off to Babylon. This marked a rather infamous ending to his personal legacy, which his pride so informed to the detriment of all else.

A House Set in God’s Order Comes by No Accident (Deut. 6:5–7)

How may we avoid the same end as Hezekiah, who spurned the Lord’s magnanimous offering of 15 more years of life for worldly honor? Deuteronomy 6 contains the well-known statement of Jesus found in the New Testament: “And thou shalt love the LORD thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might” (Deut. 6:5). A lesser known command is given next, one that pertains to the very core of family life, the upbringing of our children in the Lord along with our daily devotions with God: “And these

words . . . shall be in thine heart: and thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up” (verses 6, 7). We can infer from this text that to remain steadfast in the Lord, we need a constant interaction with His Word, either learning it ourselves or teaching it to others in our household. God’s Word is like a shield to defend us against the temptations of pride and worldly honor—those things that felled Hezekiah and his house. The Bible is replete with stories of how the family life, oriented properly around devotion to the Word of God, is like a life belt thrown to an unbelieving family member who is adrift at sea.

What She Saw in a True Witness’s House (Ruth 1)

Little did Elimelech know when he took Naomi and his sons to Moab hoping to escape the famine in his home country that this journey would ultimately result in the salvation of one of his daughters-in-law, a foreigner, who we infer did not previously know God. This foreigner ended up being part of the lineage of the Savior of the world!

Following the deaths of both sons, Naomi’s daughters-in-law wept with her because they did not want to be separated from Naomi. She told them both to return to their homes, where they would be confronted with the idolatry they had left behind. To return to their homes meant to risk forsaking the true God to return to the comfort of the Moabite lifestyle.

While both daughters-in-law weep, Orpah does leave, but Ruth has some strong words and unassailable convictions about Naomi, Ruth’s place in her family, and the truth of the God of heaven: “Intreat me not to leave thee, or to return from following after thee: for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest, I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God” (Ruth 1:16). Ruth was willing to leave everything familiar to her to remain in Naomi’s family because Naomi followed the God of heaven.

Ruth pledged not only to leave behind her home and familiar life but her very life to follow Naomi and Naomi’s God, in effect promising never to return to Moab and its gods: “Where thou diest, will I die, and there will I be buried: the LORD do so to me, and more also, if ought but death part thee and me” (Ruth 1:17). So what did Ruth see in Naomi’s house?

A Final Word Concerning the Importance of Our Home as a Witness

What did Ruth see in Naomi’s house that the Babylonian princes did not see in Hezekiah’s? Both Ruth and the princes of Babylon were foreigners among the Israelites. What if Hezekiah had acted differently? Perhaps some of the Babylonian princes would have converted to follow God. We’re not unfamiliar with Babylonian royalty believing in God, are we? Nebuchadnezzar became a follower of God through Daniel and his three friends’ powerful witness to him over years. We can’t imagine the Bible without the story of Ruth. And it’s in there because of one family’s witness; Ruth saw what was in that house and wanted it for herself. Who will come through our houses, and what will they see?

Testimony

Happy, Happy Home

Prov. 4:23

“God wants the home to be the happiest place on earth, the very symbol of the home in heaven.”¹

“The restoration and uplifting of humanity begins in the home. The work of parents underlies every other. Society is composed of families, and is what the heads of families make it. Out of the heart are ‘the issues of life’ (Proverbs 4:23); and the heart of the community, of the church, and of the nation is the household. The well-being of society, the success of the church, the prosperity of the nation, depend upon the home influences.”²

“A lamp, however small, if kept steadily burning, may be the means of lighting many other lamps.”

“Our time here is short. We can pass through this world but once; as we pass along, let us make the most of life. The work to which we are called does not require wealth or social position or great ability. It requires a kindly, self-sacrificing spirit and a steadfast purpose. A lamp, however small, if kept steadily burning, may be the means of lighting many other lamps. Our sphere of influence may seem narrow, our ability small, our opportunities few, our acquirements limited; yet wonderful possibilities are ours through a faithful use of the opportunities of our own homes. If we will open our hearts and homes to the divine principles of life we shall become channels for currents of life-giving power. From our homes will flow streams of healing, bringing life and beauty and fruitfulness where now are barrenness and death.”³

REACT

1. What are your treasures that you are tempted to show off in your home as Hezekiah did? What should be your focus instead?
2. What are the “divine principles of life”? How can we “open our hearts and homes” to them? What can you add to your daily routine to help you imitate Christ?
3. What current world issues or trends are disrupting and destroying homes that God intends to be the “symbol of the home in heaven”?

1. Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 102.

2. Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 349.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 355.

Eph. 3:14, 15

How-to *Where the Heart Is*

The family is the first place we learn about who God is, our relationship to Him, and what He asks of us. Home is the place from which our lights shine.

Unfortunately, because home is where we let down our guard, it can also be the place where we are ugliest to each other. Strained or broken family relationships can destroy the peaceful home God meant to be our spiritual foundation and a welcoming beacon to His lost children. So how do we create a family that mirrors the peace and love of God?

He is a father to the fatherless . . . , and only He can fill the void left when we are hurt or rejected by those closest to us.

Seek the Holy Spirit's presence in your life and home. God's power changes lives (Ezek. 11:19; 2 Cor. 5:17). It's only through His grace that we can overcome the selfishness that comes so naturally and instead serve one another in love (Gal. 5:13).

Practice humility. Pride is another key enemy of a peaceful home (Phil. 2:3). Jesus demonstrated the life of humble service He wants us to practice. Following in His footsteps means serving others—even, and maybe especially, the most difficult to love right in our own families—with humility.

Remember that love is a commitment, not a feeling. Modern culture tells us that love comes and goes based on how we feel about another person. But the biblical model of family love is based on a commitment that transcends our changeable emotions. (When was the last time you saw a romantic comedy about that?) Loyalty and faithfulness are expressions of love celebrated throughout the Bible, from the Ten Commandments to Abraham and Lot to Ruth to Christ's view of marriage (Matt. 19:3–6). We can do many things to build closeness with our family members, but the love and commitment we share can't depend on the emotions of the moment.

When there is brokenness, know that God is still at work. Through Christ, we may all become sons and daughters of God (2 Cor. 6:18; Rom. 8:15, 16; Gal. 4:4–7; Eph. 1:5). He is a father to the fatherless (Ps. 68:5), and only He can fill the void left when we are hurt or rejected by those closest to us. Even when your situation seems hopeless, you can trust Him to work for your good (Rom. 8:28).

REACT

1. How has your family shaped your understanding of God?
2. What do you think your family communicates to others about God?

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Opinion

Forget and Regret

Isaiah 38; 39

Regret. Years of faithful service were overshadowed by a day of poor judgment that could bring down the kingdom of Israel. King Hezekiah must have had a sinking feeling as he spoke with the prophet Isaiah. God had been good to him—had healed him, had given him the requested sign that disrupted the course of nature and literally turned time backward. Outside Israel, the sign had not gone unnoticed, and ambassadors from Babylon had arrived to inquire about this powerful God. But instead of singing God's praises, Hezekiah spent the day strutting like a peacock, showing off his wealth, and then sent the men on their way. What had they seen in his house? Glitter and gold without a glimpse of God. Isaiah enters, and Hezekiah sees what he has done. An opportunity wasted—a kingdom threatened.

Glitter and gold without a glimpse of God.

When was the last time you experienced the sting of regret? I'm not talking about minor regret from starting on a project too late or studying too little. In my experience, the most painful regret is caused by careless words or actions that hurt someone else. Most often that person is someone in or near our own "house"—a family member, a roommate, a significant other.

Familiarity makes us lazy about being on our best behavior. Our true characters come out in the presence of those closest to us. While we should take advantage of close relationships to point people to Jesus, too often we focus on ourselves and miss opportunities to show God's love.

Repeatedly, over several chapters in Deuteronomy, the children of Israel are admonished not to forget their deliverance from Egypt or the commands God gave (Deut. 6:6, 7). Wear them, display them, recite them; don't ever let God's Word be far from your mind.

Perhaps this is where Hezekiah went wrong. The king was faithful in many things, but on the day of the ambassadors' visit, he must have forgotten to keep reciting the power of God. Instead, he focused his guests' attention on himself and his stuff. Each of us should prayerfully make a wholehearted commitment to keeping God's Word ever-present in our lives, not just when we go out but especially at home.

REACT

1. When was the last time you said or did something you regretted? Why do you think it happened?
2. How can you keep God's Word central in what you do each day?

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1 Pet. 2:9

Exploration

The Ideal Family Lifestyle Is Shown to Us From the Beginning

CONCLUDE

Christians need to understand what God intended a family to look like. On the sixth day, God created male and female (Gen. 1:26, 27, 31). “God said, ‘Let Us make man in Our image, according to Our likeness’ ” (verse 26, NKJV). If the main characteristic of God is love (1 John 4:8), should not love be the very thing that people see in our Christian homes? If we live our lives imitating God, we are imitating perfection. To imitate God is to imitate who God is, what he is. God loves every one of His children. He gave us a chance to be His children and follow Him. Christ justified each one of us to imitate Him, to follow Him, to love Him. We can show the love Christ has for everyone by loving them back and showing Christ within our families.

CONSIDER

- Hosting family Bible studies and vespers.
- Taking your family to volunteer at a local shelter.
- Having family days when you go out and do fun activities with your community and church.
- Pretending you are a visitor to your home, an unbeliever, and putting together your reaction to the witness that is communicated by your home and the things in it—books, artwork, food, and so on.
- Writing a short pamphlet or organizing a short workshop for church or a small group on how to prepare your home as a witness for a non-believer (similar to a professional presentation on how to prepare your home to prevent an elderly resident from falling on rugs or tripping on an overabundance of furniture).

CONNECT

Genesis 1:26; John 1:4; Romans 3:23, 24; 1 Corinthians 4:16; Ephesians 3:15–19; 5:1; 1 Peter 2:9.

Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, pp. 35–38; *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, pp. 740–742.