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*Families in the Family of God*

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**Printing and Circulation Office:** Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1350 N. Kings Road, Nampa, ID 83687-3193

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The *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* is prepared by the Office of the Adult Bible Study Guide of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. The preparation of the guides is under the general direction of a worldwide Sabbath School Manuscript Evaluation Committee, the members of which serve as consulting editors. The published Bible Study Guide reflects the input of the committee and thus does not solely or necessarily represent the intent of the author(s). The Easy Reading Edition is prepared by the Office of the Adult Bible Study Guide in cooperation with Adventist Deaf Ministries, PO Box 6114, Mesa, AZ 85216.

## **Introduction**

### ***FAMILIES IN THE FAMILY OF GOD***

Jesus answered the lawyer's question about which was the greatest commandment. He said: " ' "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind." This is the first and greatest commandment. And the second is like it: "Love your neighbor as yourself" ' " (Matthew 22:37-39, NIV).

God cares about our relationships.<sup>1</sup> If not, He would not have said that loving others was the second most important commandment. It is no surprise Jesus put these two commandments together: Love for God cannot be shown without showing love for others.

God created people as persons with special character traits that make them who they are. But God created them also as people who like to have relationships with others. But the most important relationships are family relationships. Our characters are formed in families.

Living in a Christian family is very important. But living in a Christian family also can be a challenge. It is easy to put on false appearances in public. But at home, the masks come off. It is a lot easier to fool others than to fool our families. If you can be a Christian at home, you can be a Christian anywhere.

God designed families to be centers where we can experience close relationships with others to prepare us for a close relationship with God. In the family, both children and adults may have a warm experience that reflects (shows) the Creator and that encourages them in loving discipleship.<sup>2</sup> On the other hand, because of false love or uncaring attitudes (feelings), people may leave their home with emotional and spiritual problems that are difficult to remove.

Our homes have the greatest promise to do the most good. Our homes also can do the most harm. No wonder the Bible teaches so much about family life. So much depends upon family life.

Christian families face the challenge of trying to live according to God's will, even when each family member finds himself or herself falling short of His will (Romans 3:23). That is why true Christians take hold of Christ's sinless life by faith and claim His life as their own. This is the foundation (basis) upon which they can build a relationship with God. In this way, they will improve their relationships with their own family (Ephesians 5:2).

The wonder of our faith is the good news that God knows all about us. He

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<sup>1</sup>relationships—the connections we have with people.

<sup>2</sup>discipleship—the practice of following Jesus in all He wants you to do.

understands our weaknesses and is merciful<sup>3</sup> and patient. We get to know this about Him and experience His love for ourselves, even though we have faults. We do the same to others, especially people in our own family. Through family relationships, God wants to show His love to the world. Families learn to live together according to the Bible. Then God's grace can spread to each Christian family. In turn, they lead others to Jesus.

Sabbath and the family are two gifts God gave to humanity<sup>4</sup> in Eden. So the Sabbath and family are forever connected and meant to bring glory to God and blessings to humanity. In the past, many people who believed in Creation supported Revelation's call to worship the God who made all things (Revelation 14:7). In the same way, Seventh-day Adventists have lifted up the Sabbath. They remind the world of the Creator's rest day. The family also reminds us of Creation, when a merciful Maker prepared a place for people to rest. This place is a safe place where the power of self-giving love pulls all people into one large family. In this place, a promise is a promise; and responsibility means responsibility. This safe place of rest is the home.

But this quarter's study points to the sad fact that for many, this place of rest and peace does not exist as it should. Through Bible study, our goal is to help homes and families be what God wants them to be. At the end of the quarter, even if one home is made more loving and more secure (safe) in Christ, these lessons will have done a good job.

Ron Flowers is the author of this quarter's study. He and his wife Karen have worked in the Department of Family Ministries at the General Conference since 1980. Both have been teaching and writing on family issues for many years. They have two adult children.

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<sup>3</sup>merciful—full of mercy. Mercy is kindness we do not deserve.

<sup>4</sup>humanity—all the people of the world.