

Parents and Children



SABBATH—MAY 18

READ FOR THIS WEEK’S LESSON: Genesis 18:11; Jeremiah 31:25; Psalm 127; Genesis 18:18, 19; Proverbs 22:6.

MEMORY VERSE: “Children are a gift from the LORD. They are a reward from him” (Psalm 127:3, NIV).

EVERY BABY BORN is a miracle. True, babies are born every day. So, sometimes it is easy to forget that each baby is a gift from God. But maybe this thought can help: Make a picture in your mind of Eve holding baby Cain in her arms. What do you think she felt when she held him for the first time? What about all the changes she felt in her body when Cain grew inside her? And what pain do you think she felt when Cain was being born? What do you think she thought when she looked into his eyes for the first time? He looked the same as Adam and her. But he was so small and weak! And what about Sarah? She had a baby in her 90s! What do you think she felt when she first looked at the face of her son, Isaac? His name comes from a word that means “to laugh.” No doubt Sarah laughed with joy every time she said Isaac’s name! Hannah prayed a long time for a son. Then God gave her Samuel. She said, “I prayed for this child. The Lord answered my prayer and gave him to me” (1 Samuel 1:27, ICB). And then there is Mary. She became a mother when she was very young. She must have felt deep love as she held God’s Son in her arms.

Not everyone becomes a mother or father. But many of us do become parents. This week we will look at the experience of parents: their joys, fears, and the special problems they meet as they raise their children for God.



Mary must have felt deep love when she held God’s Son in her arms.

THE STRONG WISH FOR A CHILD (Genesis 18:11)

Read Genesis 18:11; Genesis 30:1; 1 Samuel 1:1–8; and Luke 1:7. What is the same about all the people in these verses? How did God answer their prayers?



Some people choose to adopt a child. They want to give a child who is already born a chance at a better life than the one he or she has.

Children are a blessing. But God does not always bless every couple with children. Many people pray for a family. And God gives them children. Sometimes the child is a miracle. Just look at Sarah! But sometimes people pray for children, and God does not give them any. These couples feel a lot of pain when they see their friends having babies. People may ask them, “How many children do you have?” This question only makes the cut in their hearts grow deeper.

You must believe that God understands your sadness. A writer of the psalms says: “You know I am very upset. You know how much I have cried. Surely you have kept an account [record] of all my tears” (Psalm 56:8, ERV). There are times when we pray, but God seems to be silent. He does not seem to pay attention to our prayers. But we must remember: “the LORD is as kind to his followers as a father is to his children” (Psalm 103:13, ERV).

Some people may decide they do not want to have children. We live on an earth filled with sin, pain, and evil. So, it is easy to understand the reasons why some people may not want to have kids. Other people may choose to adopt a child. They want to give a child who is already born a chance at a better life than the one he or she has.

You will meet many different people in life. Some of these people choose to have children. Other people you meet choose not to have any kids. We may not always know their reasons. But we can be sure about one thing: we are all God’s children. God’s love for His children never fails. In the end, He wants only what is best for us. At the same time, let us always remember to be very kind to people who want children but do not have them.

Jesus never had any children of His own. Why do you think He chose not to have kids? What comfort can His choice give parents who have no children? What lessons can His choice teach us?

THE SINGLE PARENT (Jeremiah 31:25)

Today many fathers and mothers must raise their children alone. They do not have a wife or husband to help them. Often it is the mother who raises her child or children alone. But that is not always true. Sometimes fathers raise their children alone too.

We often think that single parents were unmarried when they had a baby. But that is not always true either. Look at Hagar. She was forced to have a baby with Abraham. Later on, she was forced to leave with her child (Genesis 16:3, 4; Genesis 21:17). Then there is King David. He had sex with Bathsheba. Then David killed her husband and married her. Later, Bathsheba had David's baby (2 Samuel 11:4, 5). What about Elijah? God sent Elijah to a village named Zarephath. There, Elijah helped a single mother. She also was a widow (1 Kings 17:9). And finally, there is Joseph. Joseph adopted Jesus. But later Joseph died. Then Joseph's wife Mary became a widow and a single parent. "Joseph knew the secret about how Jesus was born. Now Mary had no one to talk to about her hopes and fears."—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, page 145, adapted.

Single parents have a hard job. It is not easy raising a child alone. Many single parents worry about money. They also may not get along with their ex-husbands or ex-wives. Single parents get so busy taking care of their kids. It can be hard for them to find time to spend with God. Many single parents wonder if anyone will ever love them again.

Look at the promises in Jeremiah 31:25; Matthew 11:28; Jeremiah 29:11; Jeremiah 32:27; Proverbs 3:5, 6; and Isaiah 43:1, 2. What hope do these promises give to single parents? What hope do they give to the rest of us too?

It is our job as a church to help single parents. Read James 1:27. James was talking about orphans and widows. But we can add single parents to this verse too. We can help single parents in many ways. Money is not the only way we can help. Many single parents need time alone. Maybe we can offer to take care of their children for a few hours. Then they can do other chores. Or they can rest, pray, and read the Bible. We can teach their children. Or we can repair things in their homes. We can be God's hands in many ways.

What can you do to encourage and help single parents?



Many single parents need time alone to rest, pray, and read the Bible.

THE JOY OF BEING A PARENT (Psalm 127)



Truth must be “written” on the “doors” of our lives for everyone to see.

Read Psalm 127. What is the basic message of this short psalm? What important rules does it teach us about how we should live?

Do you enjoy cooking? Maybe you have a favorite recipe or dish you like to make. So, you know it is very important to do what the recipe says. First, you need all the ingredients. Then, you must follow all the directions. If you do these two things, the recipe will turn out right most of the time. But being a good parent is not the same as cooking. There is no “recipe” to help us be good parents! No two children are exactly the same either. Even if you raise all your children the same way, each child can grow in different ways. But what was God’s plan for our children from the start of their lives? He wanted parents to teach their children to love and obey Him (Deuteronomy 6:4–9; Psalm 78:5–7). God’s command is: “Train [teach] a child how to live the right way. Then even when he is old, he will still [continue to] live that way” (Proverbs 22:6, ICB). This command does **not** mean that parents should stay near their children at all times to make sure their kids never make any mistakes!

We want to see our children grow from cute little babies into good adults who know, love, and serve Jesus. As parents, we can follow God’s special plan for our children in Deuteronomy 6. This plan will help our kids grow into strong spiritual adults. There are four important things we need to do first before we follow the plan: (1) We must accept Jesus as “the LORD our God” (Deuteronomy 6:4, KJV). (2) We must love Jesus fully with our whole heart (Deuteronomy 6:5). (3) We must accept the Bible as God’s Word (Deuteronomy 6:6). And (4), We must share with our children what we know about Him (Deuteronomy 6:20–23).

Deuteronomy 6 gives us two more important rules to follow. First, there is the “teach-talk” rule (Deuteronomy 6:7). Teaching happens during family worship when we study the Bible with our children. Talking happens in our day-to-day life. We talk with our children about the things we see every day. We use these examples to teach our children Bible truth (Genesis 18:19). The second rule is the “tie-write” rule (Deuteronomy 6:8, 9). Spiritual truth must be “tied” to what we do and think. Truth also must be “written” on the “doors” of our lives for everyone to see.

TEACH YOUR CHILDREN TO FOLLOW JESUS (Genesis 18:18, 19)

Read about the fathers in Genesis 18:18, 19 and 1 Samuel 3:10–14. How did each father raise his children?

God commands parents to teach their children to follow Him. Many parents believe that the best way to teach and correct children is by spanking them (Proverbs 22:15; Proverbs 23:13; Proverbs 29:15). Too often, these verses from Proverbs have been used in the wrong way. Some parents punish their children to force them to obey. But often the children turn against their parents and God.

The Bible teaches parents to be kind to their children (Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:21). Parents must teach their children to be holy (Psalm 78:5; Proverbs 22:6; Isaiah 38:19; Joel 1:3). As parents, we must take care of our children's needs (2 Corinthians 12:14). We must be good examples for them to follow (Genesis 18:19; Exodus 13:8; Titus 2:2). The Bible tells us to manage our families in the right way (1 Timothy 3:4, 5, 12). We also must correct our children when they make mistakes (Proverbs 29:15, 17). We must show our children God's love in everything we do (Isaiah 66:13; Psalm 103:13; Luke 11:11).

The Bible shows us parents who made bad choices. Isaac and Rebekah had two sons, Esau and Jacob. Isaac loved Esau more than Jacob. But Rebekah loved Jacob more than Esau (Genesis 25:28). Later on, Jacob did the same thing when he had children. He loved Joseph more than he loved any of his other sons (Genesis 37:3). Eli was a religious leader. But he did not teach his children to do right when they did wrong (1 Samuel 3:10–14). Eli also raised Samuel. Samuel did not grow up to be a very good father either (1 Samuel 8:1–6). King David had sex with another man's wife. Then David ordered someone to kill the man. David was a bad example. Some of his sons did worse sins than their father did. King Manasseh worshiped demons. He killed his children to honor the demons (2 Kings 21:1–9). King Ahaz did the same thing (2 Kings 16:2–4).

The Bible also shows us good examples of parents too. Mordecai was a wonderful father to Hadassah, who also was named Queen Esther (Esther 2:7). Job prayed for his kids every day (Job 1:4, 5). In all these examples, we learn lessons about what we should do and not do as parents.

What can we learn from the Bible about being good parents?



Job prayed for his kids every day (Job 1:4, 5).

WHEN YOUR CHILD TURNS AWAY FROM GOD (Proverbs 22:6)

Read Proverbs 22:6. What does this verse mean? Is this verse a promise that can never fail? Explain your answer.



The seeds of truth the parents planted in their children's hearts will always be there.

Sometimes as a parent you do everything right. You spend time with your children. You teach them the right things. You live a holy life. You send your kids to good schools. You take them to church every Sabbath. You do special work for God with them. And what happens? They grow up and leave the church. The pain you feel is awful when that happens. You feel you cannot rest for a second. You worry all the time about your children. Will they be saved? But what happened is not always the parents' fault. Children have minds of their own. In the end, they are responsible to God for their choices and behavior.

Some Christians think that the words of Proverbs 22:6 are a promise that cannot fail. They think that God will save their children because they raised them in the right way. But Proverbs often gives us important rules. Many of these rules are the same as promises that will never fail. Proverbs 22:6 tells us that the lessons we teach our children will last them a lifetime. Our children must decide what they will believe. Will they accept the faith and religion of their parents? Or will they turn away from it? No parent can make this choice for their children. God promises parents that what they taught their children will always be with them. What if the children walk away from God? Then the seeds of truth the parents planted in their children's hearts will always be there. God always will help our children remember these seeds of truth. He will never stop inviting our children to come back to His truth. The decision to be a good parent is your choice. But what your children choose to believe is their choice.

What should you do when your children turn away from God? Give your children to God. Pray for them. If anyone understands your pain, it is God. His children on this earth have turned their backs on Him. And He is the perfect Parent! You can pray for your children. You can give them your love and support. You can be there for them as they fight to come back to God. Do not be afraid to ask church members for support or prayer too. Do not blame yourself. Do not forget the rest of your family either. Remember that God loves your child more than you do.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: “Take time to talk and pray with your little children. Do not let anything get in the way of this special time. Tell your friends, ‘God has given me work to do. I have no time to sit and listen to bad news about anyone.’ You should feel that your work as a parent is very important. Your first duty is to get your children ready for heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, pages 266, 267, adapted.

“Parents, you should start to teach your children to obey you when they are babies. Teach them to respect your wishes. Here is how you do it. Be firm. Have perfect control over your spirit. Be gentle. But at the same time teach your children to do what you want. Then they will learn to obey your wishes. Parents must start training their children when they are very young. Parents also need to stop the first signs of a child’s bad temper. What if parents do not stop the first signs of their children’s bad tempers? Then the children become stubborn. They continue to get more stubborn as they grow older.”—Ellen G. White, *Testimonies [messages] for the Church*, volume 1, page 218, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- 1 What does it mean to be a “child” of God? Explain that word picture. What comfort does this word picture give you?
- 2 When is the best time for parents to start teaching their children to obey them? What is the best way for parents to teach their children to obey them? Why must parents first follow God’s plan for their lives before they can expect their children to obey them?
- 3 Think some more about what it means to be a single parent. What are some ways your church can help single parents and their children?
- 4 What are some ways we can encourage parents whose children have turned away from God?



Take time to talk and pray with your little children.