

The Family



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Gen. 3:1–15, 2 Cor. 4:6, Luke 1:26–38, Matt. 1:18–24, Eph. 4:15, 1 John 3:18, Deuteronomy 6.*

Memory Text: “My son, hear the instruction of your father, and do not forsake the law of your mother” (*Proverbs 1:8, NKJV*).

As human beings, we are always (ideally) learning. In fact, life itself is a school.

“From the earliest times the faithful in Israel had given much care to the education of the youth. The Lord had directed that even from babyhood the children should be taught of His goodness and His greatness, especially as revealed in His law, and shown in the history of Israel. Song and prayer and lessons from the Scriptures were to be adapted to the opening mind. Fathers and mothers were to instruct their children that the law of God is an expression of His character, and that as they received the principles of the law into the heart, the image of God was traced on mind and soul. Much of the teaching was oral; but the youth also learned to read the Hebrew writings; and the parchment rolls of the Old Testament Scriptures were open to their study.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 69.

For most of human history, education took place mostly in the home, especially for the early years. What does the Bible say about education in the family, and what principle can we take away from it for ourselves, whatever our family situation happens to be?

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, October 10.

The First Family

We haven't been given many details—none, really—in the initial pages of Scripture regarding the kind of family education that went on in the earliest days of human history, though we can be sure that it was in the family structure itself that education took place back then.

“The system of education established in Eden centered in the family. Adam was ‘the son of God’ (*Luke 3:38*), and it was from their Father that the children of the Highest received instruction. Theirs, in the truest sense, was a family school.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 33.

And though we don't know exactly what was taught, we may be sure that it dealt with the wonders of Creation and, after sin, the plan of Redemption.

What do the following texts teach, and why would these surely have been part of the education that Adam and Eve imparted to their children? *Genesis 1, 2, Gen. 3:1–15, 2 Cor. 4:6, Luke 10:27, Gal. 3:11, Rev. 22:12.*

“The system of education instituted at the beginning of the world was to be a model for man throughout all aftertime. As an illustration of its principles a model school was established in Eden, the home of our first parents.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 20.

Christian education is a commitment to educating families and members in doctrine, worship, instruction, fellowship, evangelism, and service. Home is where you minister to family members about the love and promises of God. It is where Jesus is introduced to children as their Lord and Savior and Friend and where the Bible is upheld as the Word of God. Family is where you model what a healthy relationship with our heavenly Father looks like.

In Genesis 4:1–4, we have both Cain and Abel bringing their offerings to the Lord. We surely can assume that they learned about the meaning and importance of the offerings as part of their family education regarding the plan of salvation. Of course, as the story shows, a good education doesn't always lead to the kind of outcome that one would hope for.

Whatever your home situation is, what choices can you make in order for it to be an environment where truth is taught and lived out?

The Childhood of Jesus

Scripture gives us very little detail about the childhood of Jesus. Much from those years remains a mystery. However, we have been given some insight into the character of His earthly parents, Mary and Joseph, and what we learn about them could help explain to us something of His childhood and early education.

What do these texts teach us about Mary and Joseph, and how might they give us insight into how Jesus had been educated by His parents?

Luke 1:26–38 _____

Luke 1:46–55 _____

Matt. 1:18–24 _____

Through these texts we can see that both Mary and Joseph were faithful Jews, seeking to live in obedience to the laws and commandments of God. And indeed, when the Lord came to them and told them about what was going to happen with them, they faithfully did all that they were told.

“The child Jesus did not receive instruction in the synagogue schools. His mother was His first human teacher. From her lips and from the scrolls of the prophets, He learned of heavenly things. The very words which He Himself had spoken to Moses for Israel He was now taught at His mother’s knee. As He advanced from childhood to youth, He did not seek the schools of the rabbis. He needed not the education to be obtained from such sources; for God was His instructor.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 70.

No doubt Mary and Joseph were good and faithful teachers to the Child, but, as the story in Luke 2:41–50 reveals, there was much about their Son that they did not understand, because Jesus had knowledge and wisdom that had been imparted to Him only by the Lord.

Read again the Ellen G. White quote above. How do we wrap our minds around what she wrote here about how Jesus learned at His mother’s knee the words that He Himself had spoken? What does this tell us about the amazing love of God? How should we, fallen and sinful creatures, respond?

Communication

In a very real sense, education at any level is communication. The teacher is the one who has knowledge, wisdom, information, facts, whatever, to convey to the student. Someone filled with a lot of knowledge must be able to communicate it to others; otherwise, what good is all that he or she knows, at least in terms of teaching?

At another level, however, good teaching skills are not just the ability to communicate. Also crucial to the whole process is the building of a relationship. “The true teacher can impart to his pupils few gifts so valuable as the gift of his own companionship. It is true of men and women, and how much more of youth and children, that only as we come in touch through sympathy can we understand them; and we need to understand in order most effectively to benefit.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 212.

In other words, good teaching works on the emotional and personal level, as well. In the case of the family as a school, this is so very important. A good relationship must be built between the student and teacher.

Relationships are established and developed by means of communication. When Christians do not communicate with God, such as by reading the Bible or in prayer, their relationship with God stagnates. Families need divine guidance if they are to grow in the grace and knowledge of Christ.

Read the following texts. What can we learn from them about how to build strong family relationships (or any kind of relationship, for that matter)? *Ps. 37:7–9; Prov. 10:31, 32; Prov. 27:17; Eph. 4:15; 1 John 3:18; Titus 3:1, 2; James 4:11.*

Taking the time to sow the proper seeds of communication will not only prepare family members for a personal relationship with Christ, but also help to develop interpersonal relationships within the family. It will open up channels of communication that you will be glad you formed once your children reach puberty and adulthood. And even if you don’t have children, the principles found in these texts can work for all kinds of relationships.

Think, too, about why it is not just what we say that is so important, but *how* we say it. What have you learned from situations in which the way you said something pretty much ruined the impact of what you had said, even if what you said was correct?

The Role of Parents

“And, ye fathers, provoke not your children to wrath: but bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord” (Eph. 6:4).

“Who can find a virtuous wife? For her worth is far above rubies” (Prov. 31:10, NKJV).

Parents have an awesome responsibility. The father is the head of the family, and the family is the nursery of church, school, and society. If the father is weak, irresponsible, and incompetent, then the family, church, school, and society will suffer the consequences. Fathers should seek to demonstrate the fruit of the Spirit—“love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance” (Gal. 5:22, 23).

Mothers, too, have perhaps the most important role in all society. They have great influence in shaping the characters of their children and establishing the mood and temperament of the home. Fathers should do all they can to work with the mothers in the education of their children.

What can fathers and mothers learn from these texts? Eph. 5:22, 23, 25, 26; 1 Cor. 11:3; 2 Cor. 6:14; Rom. 13:13, 14; 2 Pet. 1:5–7; Phil. 4:8.

Christian parents have a moral obligation to provide a biblical model of Christ and the church by their behavior. The marriage relationship is an analogy of Christ’s relationship to the church. When parents refuse to lead, or if they lead in a tyrannical manner, then they are painting a false picture of Christ for their own children and for the world. God commands all Christian parents to diligently teach their children (see Deut. 6:7). Parents have the responsibility to teach their children to love the Lord with their whole heart. They are to teach the fear of the Lord, a total loving devotion and submission to Him.

In Deuteronomy 6:7, the children of Israel were given specific instructions about educating their children in regard to the great things the Lord had done for His people. However great a story the elders had to tell their children, we, who live after the cross of Christ, have a much better one to tell, don’t we?

Thus, the healing or training we are to give is an ongoing proactive event in which we pour the truth of God into our children and prepare them for their own relationship with Christ.

In the end, though, we all have been given the sacred gift of free will. Ultimately, when they are adults, our children will have to answer for themselves before God.

Lest Ye Forget

Before the children of Israel were to enter into the Promised Land, Moses spoke to them again, recounting the wonderful ways that the Lord had led them, and he admonished them again and again not to forget what the Lord had done for them. In many ways Deuteronomy was Moses' last will and testament. And though written thousands of years ago, in a culture and life situation radically different from anything we face today, the principles there apply to us, as well.

Read Deuteronomy 6. What can we learn from this chapter about the principles of Christian education? What should be central to all that we teach, not just to our children but to anyone who doesn't know what we know about God and His great acts of salvation? What warnings are found in these verses, as well?

So, central to all that they were to teach their children was the marvelous working of God among them. Also, how clearly was the warning given not to forget all that God had done for them.

Of course, if parents are to play the first major role in integrating biblical teachings into their children's lives, then they have a responsibility to organize and prepare their own lives in such a manner that they have adequate knowledge and time to spend with their children.

"The child's first teacher is the mother. During the period of greatest susceptibility and most rapid development his education is to a great degree in her hands."—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 275.

This is the essential time when parents minister to their children about the love and promises of God. Designating a regularly scheduled time to teach the wisdom and promises of God personally to your children will positively impact your family for generations to come.

Read this text: "You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up" (Deut. 6:7, NKJV). What is the point here, and what should it tell us about how crucial it is always to keep the reality of the Lord before not just our children but our own selves, as well?

Further Thought: Read Ellen G. White, “Preparation,” pp. 275–282; “Cooperation,” pp. 283–286; and “Discipline,” pp. 287–297, in *Education*.

“Upon fathers as well as mothers rests a responsibility for the child’s earlier as well as its later training, and for both parents the demand for careful and thorough preparation is most urgent. Before taking upon themselves the possibilities of fatherhood and motherhood, men and women should become acquainted with the laws of physical development . . . ; they should also understand the laws of mental development and moral training.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 276.

“The work of co-operation should begin with the father and mother themselves, in the home life. In the training of their children they have a joint responsibility, and it should be their constant endeavor to act together. Let them yield themselves to God, seeking help from Him to sustain each other. . . . Parents who give this training are not the ones likely to be found criticizing the teacher. They feel that both the interest of their children and justice to the school demand that, so far as possible, they sustain and honor the one who shares their responsibility.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 283.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Whether we have children or not, we all exist in some sort of domicile, and we all interact with others, as well. What have you learned from this week’s lesson that can help you in interacting with, or even witnessing to, others, whether in the place where you live or elsewhere?
- 2 We tend to view education as a good thing. (After all, who can be against education?) But is this always the case? What might be examples of education’s having been perverted and turned into something bad? What can we learn from those negative examples that could help us make education a good thing?
- 3 As stated in Wednesday’s study, we all have been given the sacred gift of free will. Sooner or later, when children become young adults or even adults, they will have to make their own decisions regarding the God whom they had been taught about all their young lives. Why must all parents—and anyone, really—who seek to witness to others and to teach others the gospel, always keep in mind this crucial truth about free will?

Australian Risks All in Africa

By VANIA CHEW

Ettienne McClintock, 51, wasn't taking anything for granted in Ethiopia.

The 3ABN Australia radio host was preaching in Shisho, a rural town located 20 miles (35 kilometers) from Awassa, the second-biggest city in Ethiopia, as part of 2019 Total Member Involvement meetings organized by the East-Central Africa Division. Electricity was intermittent, and he spent the first two nights presenting in the dark.

Despite the technical challenges, more than four hundred people were attending the outdoor meetings. The crowd was far bigger than the church could handle, and Ettienne was preaching from a makeshift shelter with plastic sheets for a roof.

Ettienne was worried as he prepared for the third meeting. Although a rented generator provided power, rain began to fall just 30 minutes before opening time. He hoped people wouldn't be deterred from attending.

The rain stopped by the beginning of the meeting, but rain clouds filled the sky. Ettienne was barely 15 minutes into his sermon when the rain started. As the downpour intensified, people left the meeting. Although Ettienne had some protection in his makeshift shelter, his audience was sitting in the open air. "The church elders and I had prayed for the rain to stay away, and now the rain had come back," Ettienne recalled. "We had to do something. But what?"

Suddenly it came to him. Every evening, he had been sharing about God's power over sickness, sin, and death. But God also had power over the weather. He could pray for the rain to stop. But what if God chose not to stop the rain? His message would lose credibility, and people might stop attending.

At that moment, 1 John 5:14 flashed into Ettienne's mind: "Now this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us" (*NKJV*).

Ettienne prayed silently, "Lord, I believe, but please help my unbelief."

Through his interpreter, he invited the audience to pray with him for the rain to stop. Moments after he said, "Amen," the rain stopped. It didn't rain again for the rest of the program. After the sermon, about two hundred people came to the front to ask for prayer. "There were people kneeling everywhere," Ettienne said. "As we knelt in the dirt, we prayed a prayer of thanksgiving and dedication to God."



Seeing half of the audience kneeling on the ground, Ettienne remembered his family and friends praying for his meetings in Australia. He thanked God for their prayers. "God gave me a new experience," he said. "Up until that point in my life, I took low risks for God with low rewards. This was a high risk that made me feel uncomfortable and vulnerable, but the reward was amazing."

Part I: Overview

In fact, life itself is a school. Thus, the lesson begins and proceeds to demonstrate that the family is our first schoolroom. No child is too young to begin hearing about the goodness of God. Songs and prayers of God's greatness should begin at crib-side and continue till graveside.

Adam, Eve, Cain, and Abel, along with their wives, are honored with being this world's first family. How hard it is for us to conceive what it would have been like to have the sum of human history looking across at you at the breakfast table! The Garden of Eden, lush but inaccessible, is still within their view, not to mention an angelic sentinel and his sword of fire. No doubt the awful splendor of these sights inspires endless questions from the young boys. "The Creator God did that" would have been an answer to strings of *why-and-how* questions bubbling up from the boys' curious minds. Adam's and Eve's answers would have been based on their eyewitness accounts and personal experience of engagement with this Creator God. They'd have a primitive gospel to share that spoke of a divine Son who would one day be born to crush the head of the serpent, yet not without sacrifice to Himself (*Gen. 3:15*), in order to bring the human family back to the garden and the way things should be.

A picture of this divine Son's childhood and education can be loosely constructed from the first chapters of Luke and Matthew. This picture pays a compliment to the value of education as Jesus takes the opportunity to learn from His heavenly Father, and to instruct the priesthood in the temple (*Luke 2:41-51*).

The lesson highlights communication, the avenue through which education comes. It makes the important point that building relationships is a key component for effective communication and teaching. This idea is further developed below.

Part II: Commentary

We cannot overestimate the influence of family. It literally makes us who we are. Even the teen who rebels against everything his or her family stands for is still being shaped by the family, in this case through antagonism rather than submission. But we always hope that our families will be the locus of an education that prepares us for godliness, emotional and relational stability, intellectual and vocational pursuits, and physical well-being. Each one of those topics could lead to information overload;

so, the lesson provides a key thought, perhaps too often overlooked, that is important in order for education in all areas to be effective—the necessity of building relationships. The relationship between the educators and the learners, whether they be parents and children or teachers and students, often determines whether effective learning is taking place.

Relationships and Child-Rearing

Many parents are hopeful that the early indoctrination of their children with Adventist ideals, teachings, and lifestyle will lead them to become faithful Seventh-day Adventists as adults whose commitment to God and the church may motivate them to full-time ministry. However, to many parents' dismay, not only do their children not remain Seventh-day Adventists into their young adult years but they also make no profession of Christianity at all. Their morally unrestrained lifestyle even exceeds that of their peers who had zero Christian upbringing. The parents' hopes are dashed, and they are left baffled as to what happened and where they went wrong.

So many families sincerely do what they think is right in the rearing of children, only to reap an outcome opposite to their expectations. Of course, there are countless variables that can cause children to reject their Adventist education. But for the sake of Adventist children, let us as parents ask the hard relationship questions about what may have gone wrong.

How frequently do parents and children share matters of the heart with each other? Does the child feel safe to share hopes, fears, and troubles with his or her parents? Do the parents continually seek to affirm where the child is doing well, or does the child only hear criticism when he or she makes a mistake? Are the parents patient as the child stumbles along in learning new activities or responsibilities? Do the parents express empathy toward their children, remembering what it was like to be a child themselves? Do the parents gently guide the children to have a relationship with God? Or do they simply ramrod religious instruction instead? Are the parents secure and adult enough to admit to their children when they make a mistake and to ask for forgiveness? Or do they continually maintain a façade of perfection that the children see through anyway? Have the parents devoted time to give exclusive attention to their children? Do they play with their children? Has respect been cultivated and earned between both parent and child? Do the parents apply discipline in a calm, controlled environment, or impulsively in frustration or anger? Do they communicate words and actions of love and tender care to the child, so that the child knows that they love him

or her unconditionally? And the list goes on . . .

These questions are important. Regardless of how dedicated parents are in inculcating Adventist religious instruction into their children, if the core issues that the questions just mentioned address are not interwoven into their parenting philosophy, it all may be for nothing. There are moments when it is time to put down the textbook, take a break from the chores, and, instead, spend quality time with your kids. Invest in the relationship, and the dividends are likely to be an effective education, culminating in a lifelong commitment to Christ and eternal life.

“Both parents and teachers are in danger of commanding and dictating too much, while they fail to come sufficiently into social relation with their children or their scholars. They maintain too great a reserve, and exercise their authority in a cold, unsympathizing manner, which tends to repel instead of winning confidence and affection. If they would oftener gather the children about them, and manifest an interest in their work, and even in their sports, they would gain the love and confidence of the little ones, and the lesson of respect and obedience would be far more readily learned; for love is the best teacher. A similar interest manifested for the youth will secure like results. The young heart is quick to respond to the touch of sympathy.”—Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 58.

Jesus and the Rabbinical School in Jerusalem

The account of the encounter between the preteen Jesus and the learned doctors of Jewish law during His Passover visit to Jerusalem is brief but dense. “After three days they found him in the temple, sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers” (*Luke 2:46, 47, ESV*). So, what makes Jesus the model student? To glean insights into that question, let’s look at the following statement from Ellen G. White: “At that day an apartment connected with the temple was devoted to a sacred school, after the manner of the schools of the prophets. Here leading rabbis with their pupils assembled, and hither the child Jesus came. Seating Himself at the feet of these grave, learned men, He listened to their instruction. As one seeking for wisdom, He questioned these teachers in regard to the prophecies, and to events then taking place that pointed to the advent of the Messiah.

“Jesus presented Himself as one thirsting for a knowledge of God. . . . The doctors turned upon Him with questions, and they were amazed at His answers. With the humility of a child He repeated the words of Scripture, giving them a depth of meaning that the wise men had not conceived of. If followed, the lines of truth He pointed out

would have worked a reformation in the religion of the day. A deep interest in spiritual things would have been awakened; and when Jesus began His ministry, many would have been prepared to receive Him.

“The rabbis knew that Jesus had not been instructed in their schools; yet His understanding of the prophecies far exceeded theirs. In this thoughtful Galilean boy they discerned great promise. They desired to gain Him as a student, that He might become a teacher in Israel. They wanted to have charge of His education, feeling that a mind so original must be brought under their molding.

“The words of Jesus had moved their hearts as they had never before been moved by words from human lips. . . . The youthful modesty and grace of Jesus disarmed their prejudices. Unconsciously their minds were opened to the word of God, and the Holy Spirit spoke to their hearts.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 78–80. Every Christian knows that Jesus is the Teacher of teachers, but how often is He known as the Student of students?

So, what makes Jesus the model Student? He has a curiosity and hunger for knowledge of God that makes Him an attentive listener. He asks questions, showing that He is an active, not just a passive, learner. He’s not reluctant to offer answers either. He shows that He can be vulnerable and put His ideas out on the table for others to judge, criticize, or affirm. This builds the resilience He will need when, as an adult, His words will bring accusations of demon possession (*John 8:48*) and calls for His death (*John 8:40*). But as a Boy who has been speaking of God since He was 12 (and probably sooner), He could not be intimidated. Good students always make the best teachers.

Part III: Life Application

Though the family is the first schoolroom, no one is guaranteed that it will be a good one. There may be many things we must *unlearn* from our families. If we were fortunate, we gleaned a few (or more) good principles worth holding on to for a lifetime. Discuss some of these issues with your Sabbath School class for the purpose of showing how God helps us handle the good and the bad experiences of family life.

- 1. What were the negative patterns within your family that you told yourself you would never pass on to your own young family? In what ways did both God and Scripture help you identify those negative patterns? What insights did you gain that taught you to prevent their recurrence?**

