

Preparing for Change



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *1 Cor. 10:1–13, Gen. 2:24, 1 Cor. 13:4–8, 1 Sam. 1:27, Psalm 71, 1 Cor. 15:24–26.*

Memory Text: “Righteousness will go before Him, and shall make His footsteps our pathway” (*Psalm 85:13, NKJV*).

Life is full of changes. Things change all the time. The only thing that does not change is the reality of change itself. Change, in fact, is a part of our very existence. Even the laws of physics seem to teach that change exists in the most basic fabric of reality.

Often, changes come unexpectedly. We are going along in a routine when, suddenly, instantly, everything changes, and we are caught completely off guard.

On the other hand, sometimes we can see changes coming. We are given forewarnings, signs, and indicators that let us know things are going to be different. When this happens, it's wise to start preparing, to whatever degree possible, for what we can see coming. Many of these changes are big: marriage, children, old age, and even death.

And yes, we do not live in isolation. Which means, then, that the changes that come to us can impact our families, and in big ways, as well. At the same time, changes in our families also can impact each family member, too.

This week, let's look at some of the changes that sooner or later, in one way or another, most of us face and how these changes can impact family life.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, April 20.

Unprepared

There is one thing about the Word of God: it does not gloss over the realities of human life. On the contrary, it exposes them in all their harshness and, at times, sheer pain and despair. In fact, with the exception of the first few pages of the Bible and the last few at the end, the Word of God paints a sad picture of the human race. Paul was not exaggerating when he wrote, “For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God” (*Rom. 3:23, NKJV*).

Read 1 Corinthians 10:1–13. What warnings are there, as well as what promises?

In many ways, many of our actions in life are simply how we react to change. We constantly face changes; the challenge for us, as Christians, is to deal with them by faith, trusting in God and revealing that faith through obedience, regardless of temptations to do otherwise.

“The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for the right though the heavens fall.”—Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 57. Those words were as true for ancient Israel as they were in Ellen G. White’s time, and as they are for us now.

What mistakes did the people in the following texts make in the face of change, and what can we learn from their mistakes?

Acts 5:1–10 _____

Gen. 16:1, 2, 5, 6 _____

Matt. 20:20–22 _____

Changes come, and they often bring temptations, challenges, and even, at times, fear. Thus, how crucial it is that we have the spiritual armor on to deal with them in the right manner. Again, regardless of whether the changes are unexpected or whether they are just the typical part of life, we need to be prepared for what’s coming, both the seen and the unseen.

Preparing for Marriage

One of the greatest changes a person faces is when he or she gets married.

Of course, not everyone gets married. After all, Jesus, our greatest example, never did, nor did many other Bible characters.

Nevertheless, many people do marry, and thus, the Bible is not silent about marriage, which is surely one of the greatest life changers.

The first social arrangement mentioned in the Bible is marriage. For God, marriage is so important that the same words He told Adam and Eve in Eden about marriage appear in three other places in Scripture. “Therefore shall a man leave his father and his mother, and shall cleave unto his wife: and they shall be one flesh” (*Gen. 2:24; see also Matt. 19:5, Mark 10:7, Eph. 5:31*). These texts tell us that once a person gets married, the most important relationship in their lives should be between them and their spouse, even more than between them and their parents. Among the reasons marriage between a man and a woman is so important to God is that it typifies the relationship that exists between His Son, Jesus, and the church, His bride (*Eph. 5:32*).

In constructing a house, one needs to stop and consider the cost (*Luke 14:28–30*); how much more so when establishing a home? A house is built with brick and mortar, wood and iron, wires and glass. But a home is built with things that are not necessarily material.

What are some crucial traits that are important for all aspects of life but are especially important for those preparing for marriage? *1 Cor. 13:4–8; Gal. 5:22, 23.*

Preparation for marriage must begin with us personally and individually. At the same time, we need to look carefully at our future spouse to see if he or she would be a good complement for us. Is he or she a hard worker (*Prov. 24:30–34*)? Does he or she have a bad temper (*Prov. 22:24*)? Do we share common beliefs (*2 Cor. 6:14, 15*)? How do my family and friends feel about my future spouse (*Prov. 11:14*)? Am I relying on faith or on feelings alone (*Prov. 3:5, 6*)? The answers to these questions can mean a future of happiness or a lifetime of sorrow.

Think about some good marriages. What principles do you find there that could be applied to other kinds of interpersonal relationships, as well?

Preparing for Parenting

Few things can change our lives more than the birth of a child. Nothing in the family can or will ever be the same again.

“Like arrows in the hand of a warrior, so are the children of one’s youth. Happy is the man who has his quiver full of them” (*Ps. 127:4, 5, NKJV*).

At the same time, children do not arrive with an owner’s manual that tells their parents all they need to do to care for them and how to troubleshoot any problems that may arise. Even experienced parents are sometimes stumped by the actions, words, or attitudes of their children.

As important as it is to prepare for marriage, it is important also that those who hope to become parents be prepared for that awesome responsibility.

However unique the following stories about births were, what principles can those preparing to be parents take away from these accounts? *1 Sam. 1:27; Judg. 13:7; Luke 1:6, 13–17, 39–55, 76–79.*

What an awesome responsibility and opportunity these parents had. Three would be the parents of prophets and leaders in Israel, one of their children would be the forerunner of the promised Messiah, and one of the children would be the Christ.

Yet, even if our children are not destined to be biblical prophets, parents should still be preparing for this radical change in their lives.

“Even before the birth of the child, the preparation should begin that will enable it to fight successfully the battle against evil.

“If before the birth of her child she is self-indulgent, if she is selfish, impatient, and exacting, these traits will be reflected in the disposition of the child. Thus many children have received as a birthright almost unconquerable tendencies to evil.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 256.

Whether it is children under our care or if we have responsibilities toward other people, what are things we can do to discharge those responsibilities in the godliest manner possible?

Preparing for Old Age

“The days of our lives are seventy years; and if by reason of strength they are eighty years, yet their boast is only labor and sorrow; for it is soon cut off, and we fly away” (*Ps. 90:10, NKJV*). These words from Moses remind us of the inexorable march of time. As the years come and go, we begin to see and feel changes in our bodies. Our hair turns gray or falls out, we begin to slow down, and aches and pains become our daily companions. If we are married and have children, our children might bear their own children, and we could then enjoy our grandchildren. The previous seasons of life have helped us get ready for the last one.

Read Psalm 71. What does this psalm teach us about not just preparing for old age, but about life in general?

Psalm 71 is the psalm of an older person who experiences the challenges that come with life but who is happy because all along he or she has put their trust in God. The best way to grow old is to put our trust in Him while still young. In general terms, the author of this psalm shares three important lessons he learned as he moved toward this season of his life.

1. *Develop a deep, personal knowledge of God.* From his youth (*Ps. 71:17*), God was his strong refuge (*Ps. 71:1, 7*) and his Savior (*Ps. 71:2*). God is a rock and fortress (*Ps. 71:3*), his hope and confidence (*Ps. 71:5*). He speaks of God’s mighty deeds (*Ps. 71:16, 17*), His strength and power (*Ps. 71:18*), and all the great things He has done (*Ps. 71:19*). Ultimately he shouts, “O God, who is like You?” (*Ps. 71:19, NKJV*). Those daily conversations with God, as we study His Word and as we pause to reflect on all He does for us, will deepen our experience with Him.

2. *Develop good habits.* Good nutrition, exercise, water, sunshine, rest, et cetera will help us enjoy life longer and better. Take special note as to how the psalmist refers to the habits of trust (*Ps. 71:3*), praise (*Ps. 71:6*), and hope (*Ps. 71:14*).

3. *Develop a passion for God’s mission.* The person in Psalm 71 was not looking forward to being idle in his old age. Even in his retirement he wanted to continue praising God (*Ps. 71:8*) and telling others about Him (*Ps. 71:15–18*).

For those who are older, what are some of the benefits of getting older? What do you know now that you didn’t when younger that you could share with those who are younger?

Preparing for Death

Unless we are alive at the Second Coming, one change that we can all expect is the biggest change of all: the change from life to death. Along with marriage and birth, what change has a greater impact on family than the death of an immediate family member?

Read 1 Corinthians 15:24–26. What do these verses teach us about death?

Many times, of course, death comes unexpectedly and tragically. How many men, women, and even children woke up one morning only, before the sun set, to close their eyes not in sleep but in death? Or woke up one morning and before the sun set had lost a family member?

Other than making sure you are connected by faith with the Lord and covered in His righteousness moment by moment (*see Rom. 3:22*), you can't prepare for a death that you don't see coming, either for yourself or your loved one.

On the other hand, what would you do if you knew you had only a few months to live? We may not know for certain when death will overcome us, but we certainly may know when we are nearing the end of our life. Thus, how crucial it is to prepare ourselves and our family for the inevitable.

Read 1 Kings 2:1–4, some of the last words David spoke to his son Solomon. What lessons can we take from this about preparing for death, both for ourselves and for family members?

At first glance, one could argue, *That's rich! David, who murdered Uriah after impregnating his wife* (see 2 Samuel 11), *tells his son to walk in the way of the Lord*. On the other hand, it was perhaps precisely because of this sin and the horrible consequences that followed that David's words were so powerful. He was, no doubt, in his own way trying to warn his son away from the folly that caused him so much grief. David learned, the hard way, some difficult lessons about the cost of sin, and no doubt he had hoped to spare his son some of the grief that he himself had experienced.

Further Thought: If we read through the story of ancient Israel in the wilderness, we can see a litany of mistake after mistake in the face of great changes, even despite the amazing revelation of God’s love and power. In fact, before Israel was to, finally, enter the Promised Land—and thus face another great change—Moses said the following to ancient Israel: “ ‘Your eyes have seen what the LORD did at Baal Peor; for the LORD your God has destroyed from among you all the men who followed Baal of Peor. But you who held fast to the LORD your God are alive today every one of you. Surely I have taught you statutes and judgments, just as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should act according to them in the land which you go to possess. Therefore be careful to observe them; for this is your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples who will hear all these statutes, and say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.’ For what great nation is there that has God so near to it, as the LORD our God is to us, for whatever reason we may call upon Him? And what great nation is there that has such statutes and righteous judgments as are in all this law which I set before you this day? Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren’ ” (*Deut. 4:3–9, NKJV*). How crucial that we not forget what the Lord has done for us. And what better way not to forget than to teach it to others and to those who come after us. Notice, too, how central the family was in all this, in that they were to teach these things to their children. And the sin at Peor was something that only could be destructive to family life. “The crime that brought the judgments of God upon Israel was that of licentiousness. The forwardness of women to entrap souls did not end at Baal-peor.”—Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 326.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 In class, talk about some of the preparations you made in facing any of the big stages in life, marriage, parenting, old age, or anything else. How did the changes impact your family? What have you learned that could help others facing the same stages?
- 2 Think about David’s words to Solomon, again in the context of his sin against Bathsheba, a calamity that cast a shadow over the rest of David’s reign and greatly impacted his family for the worse. In what ways, amid it all, do we see the reality of God’s grace at work?

Praying for a Baby

By MARJORIE CHISONGA

My son was born a year after I got married.
Then nothing. No more children.

People started to notice. “Why aren’t you conceiving?” one person asked. “Maybe you should go to the medical doctor for help,” another said.

Some people suggested that I visit the witch doctor.

My husband and I wanted more children. He taught at Rusangu Secondary School, a Seventh-day Adventist boarding academy in Monze, Zambia. I was studying to become an elementary school teacher.

What could I say to those inquiring about the size of my family?

“That’s the way it is,” I repeated again and again. “God will provide.”

I wasn’t sad or annoyed by people’s pity. But as time wore on, I realized that some of my more superstitious friends thought I was being punished for some unknown reason.

Then my husband’s sister died, and we adopted her 3-year-old daughter. Now we had two children in our home. My superstitious friends rejoiced, saying the girl’s presence would wake up my hormones and allow me to have another baby.

Still nothing happened.

But the biblical story of Hannah in 1 Samuel 1 gave me hope. Hannah was a prayerful woman who never gave up. She persisted until God granted her prayer, and she gave birth to Samuel.

My husband and I kept praying. We prayed for 13 long years. Then one day I noticed something was different. I was pregnant! My husband and I immediately knelt to pray with thanksgiving.

We named our second child Cheelela, which means “worthwhile” in the Tonga language. He was well worth the wait. In no time, I gave birth to a third son, Chakondela, which means “let it be so.”

My two younger sons are now 17 and 14—and they love Jesus.

God has blessed my family abundantly. We just had to be patient. When you ask God to give you something good in faith, He will give you more than you could possibly desire.



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Part I: Overview

There are two types of unprepared people—those who know they are unprepared and those who don't. Wouldn't you rather be the former than the latter? Marriage, parenting, old age, and death form a tetrad of events that radically influence family life. How to prepare for this handful of life's monumental changes is the focus for this lesson.

No one likes to be caught unprepared. Pop quizzes, unexpected visits from friends or foes, and surprise inspections can create a knot in the stomach. The interesting thing about the tetrad of events under discussion is that the first two are by choice, and the last two are inevitable (notwithstanding an untimely birth or death, respectively). We can prepare for things we choose and know will happen. So, for the most part, we are in a position to carefully prepare for these events.

The Bible is rare among ancient literature in that it does not gloss over the failures of its heroes nor exaggerate their successes. The lesson authors highlight the fact that Scripture portrays life in an uncensored fashion. The mistakes of others are in the Bible for all to see, and, if taken seriously, serve as warning beacons. In addition, the testimonies of people's lives all around us confirm the truthfulness and timeliness of Bible principles. The following stories are two of thousands of stories that we could all share that show the folly of not preparing for old age and death in a way that glorifies the Giver of life.

Part II: Commentary

Health Illustration

Joseph grew up knowing both his grandfathers. Their closing years haunted him as an adult as he reflected on death and old age, the sections for this week's Bible study guide. Unfortunately, his grandfathers' experiences serve well to illustrate two paths to avoid. Their "blood cries out," so to speak, in warning, directing all to different paths than the ones they took.

Joseph and his wife were backpacking in the Sierra Nevadas when the call came that "Grandpa A" wasn't doing well. He had suffered a heart attack earlier that year. But things were not improving as hoped. Now he was being cared for by relatives. Joseph and his wife detoured over to see this once-robust angler who had taken Joseph halibut fishing in the Pacific Ocean and always had time for ice-cream stops with his grandson. Joseph and his wife entered his grandfather's room, where he

lay fully dressed on the top covers of a bed. He was unusually rigid, as if immobilized. The dim lights and depressive atmosphere foreshadowed the inevitable. He recognized his grandson. They shared a few inconsequential words. Then he interrupted their conversation by spurring out four words that have haunted Joseph ever since: “Your health . . . is everything.” He repeated the words as if they were going to be his last: “Your health is everything.” Afterward, Joseph could not remember a single word of the conversation before, or subsequent to, that fateful pronouncement. He and his wife left. Soon after their visit, Joseph’s grandfather went to his rest. But to this day, Joseph can still hear the desperation in his grandfather’s voice as he intoned his deathbed revelation: “Your health is everything.” Sadly, such a revelation on health comes all too often to many only after they lose it.

That revelation shouldn’t be earth-shattering news to lifelong Adventists like Joseph or others. After all, we have the health message. Joseph, like so many of us, didn’t drink, smoke, or eat unclean meats. He exercised periodically. What did he have to fear? At that time, he was much more interested in studying the Bible than in “all that health stuff,” which he didn’t have time for anyway. Worst of all, the health message seemed to turn some Adventists into legalistic fanatics. Joseph surely wasn’t going to go that route. He even convinced himself that his periodic but frequent indulgences were healthy signs of “balance” and proof of nonlegalism and nonfanaticism. As he reflected on his past dismissal of making health a priority, Paul’s words came to his mind: “When I was a child, I spoke like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child” (*1 Cor. 13:11, ESV*). Thankfully, his grandpa’s words finally took effect in his life. Better late than never, as they say.

This lesson does not intend to be a health seminar. But it does propose that a brief perspective change in how we look at health is appropriate. As aging relatives decline and eventually go to their rest, one starts to see lifelong health habits culminate in conditions of either elderly vitality or premature decrepitude. What we once thought were diseases of old age or genetics are now seen to be more dependent on lifestyle. The lifestyle factor in the United States, for example, that is causing the most deaths is both eye-opening and surprising. “The State of U.S. Health, 1990–2010 Burden of Diseases, Injuries, and Risk Factors” lists 17 risk factors related to death and disability (see U.S. Burden of Disease Collaborators, “The State of U.S. Health, 1990–2010 Burden of Diseases, Injuries, and Risk Factors,” *JAMA* 310, no. 6 [2013]: 600, doi:10.1001/jama.2013.13805).

It turns out that there is one particular risk factor topping the charts for *both* death and disability. Let that sink in for a moment. The same risk factor related to the most deaths in the U.S. and the most years

lost because of disability (and death) are the same. Any guesses? One might think the number one risk factor was alcohol, tobacco smoking, being overweight, or being inactive. Good guesses but wrong ones. The number one risk factor is what we put in our mouths every day: it is the food we eat. Don't be fooled by food labeled "organic," "vegan," "gluten-free," "vegetarian," "natural," etc. There is now a consensus among a number of health professionals that a diet consisting of primarily whole, unrefined plant foods, such as grains, beans, fruits, and vegetables, substantially reduces one's risk for numerous common diseases. Such luminaries in preventive health as Caldwell B. Esselstyn Jr., T. Colin Campbell, Dean Ornish, and John A. McDougall are in agreement with the above assessment on the role of diet on health. Neal Barnard and Michael Greger are recent advocates, as well. Each of these men holds medical degrees or PhDs in nutrition. For further information, their presence is ubiquitous on the Internet. Ellen White, ahead of her time as usual, stated more than a hundred years ago that "grains, fruits, nuts, and vegetables constitute the diet chosen for us by our Creator."—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 296.

Often, we don't like to be told what to eat. The current mantra is "I'd rather eat what I want and die happy." But those who eat "what they want," ignoring a healthful diet, often don't die happy. Instead, they die of long-drawn-out debilitating diseases or sudden premature death, as the U.S. report shows. Of course, sometimes disease and death are completely out of our control. But as Dr. Kim Williams, president of the American College of Cardiology, a man who abstains from all animal products, explains: "I don't mind dying; I just don't want it to be my fault."—Jason Kelly, "Heal Thyself," *The University of Chicago Magazine*, <http://mag.uchicago.edu/science-medicine/heal-thyself>. Both David and Hezekiah see death as something to avoid. Why? Because praise to God ceases at death (*Isa. 38:18, Ps. 115:17*). Encourage the class to realize that the simple (but sometimes difficult) step of changing one's food habits is crucial for preparing for a long life of health and happiness in the Lord.

Wisdom Illustration

"Grandpa B" was a successful man. He retired wealthy and spent his closing years playing golf and enjoying the amenities of an upper-class retirement community. During a rare family gathering, Grandpa B's adult grandchildren, including Joseph, gathered around him and asked if he could tell them what he had learned in his 80 years of life. After a few uncomfortable moments, it was obvious that Joseph's grandfather had no wisdom to pass on to his progeny. Afterward, Joseph and his cousins talked of a life that had been spent in acquiring wealth at the expense of

relationships and wisdom. Their grandfather's life was a reminder that the richest legacy one can pass on to the next generation is a wisdom sourced in "the fear of the LORD" (*Ps. 111:10*) and a model of godly living. Wisdom such as this cannot be acquired at the last minute; it has to be *lived out for years*. Encourage the class to understand that now is the time to acquire such an experience.

The famed journalist Malcolm Muggeridge, who lived a rather dissolute life, came to Christ in his later years. His words are the wise counsel that need to be passed on to, and heeded by, the next generation so that the rest of us don't get to the end of earthly sojourn and realize we've wasted our lives. "I may, I suppose, regard myself as a relatively successful man. People occasionally stare at me in the streets; that's fame. I can fairly easily earn enough money to qualify for admission to the higher slopes of the Internal Revenue Service. That's success. Furnished with money and a little fame, even the elderly, if they care to, may partake of friendly diversions. That's pleasure. It might happen once in a while that something I said or wrote was sufficiently heeded for me to persuade myself that it represented a serious impact on our time. That's fulfillment. Yet, I say to you, and I beg you to believe me, multiply these tiny triumphs by millions, add them all up together, and they are nothing, less than nothing. Indeed, a positive impediment measured against one drop of that living water Christ offers to the spiritually thirsty, irrespective of who or what they are."—In Ravi Zacharias, *Can Man Live Without God* (Nashville: W Publishing Group, 1994), p. 116.

If possible, seek out some long-lived, sage men and women who are willing to share with the class some godly gems of wisdom they've learned.

Part III: Life Application

Some steps for preparing for marriage, parenting, and old age are the same. First, read all the counsels, proverbs, and stories in the Bible on those topics. Second, read Christian-based, extrabiblical material from authors who specialize in those areas. Next, interview/dialogue with married couples, parents, and elderly individuals in order to receive the clearest picture possible of those events.

Another practical step is to "count the cost" (*Luke 14:28, ESV*). This step applies directly to each person, whether marriage and parenting are in one's future, and, indirectly, to old age and death. Consider such questions as:

- 1. There are elderly people right now in their 70s and 80s who are backpacking up mountains, and there are elderly people of the**

same age who are struggling up a flight of stairs. What lifestyle changes do I need to adopt today to give me the best chances of optimal health for those later years?

2. Having children is a tremendous blessing (*Ps. 127:3–5*)—but also a sacrifice of one’s time, resources, and energy. The moment they are born there is an ever-present concern over their safety, development, well-being, and salvation. All planning, moving, and spontaneity become significantly more complex. The love bond we have with children makes it all worth it in the moment, but all too many fail to ask the important question of whether children coincide well with the life direction in which the Lord is leading them.
