

What Have They Seen *in* Your House?



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Isaiah 38; 39; 1 Cor. 7:12–15; 1 Pet. 3:1, 2; Heb. 6:12; 13:7; 3 John 11; Isa. 58:6, 7, 10, 12.*

Memory Text: “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 Peter 2:9, NKJV*).

Perhaps we have reached a stage when, thanks be to the Lord, our lives are (at least for now) going well: family is fine, work is fine, health and finances are, too. Or maybe not? Maybe your home, for now, is in pain, turmoil? Either way, when someone comes to visit your home, like emissaries from Babylon who visited King Hezekiah, what answer could be given to the question that the prophet Isaiah later asked the king: “What have they seen in your house?” (*Isa. 39:4, NKJV*).

What have people seen in your house? What have heavenly angels seen? What kind of spirit permeates our residences? Can one “smell” the scent of prayer? Is there kindness, generosity, love, or tension, anger, resentfulness, bitterness, and discord? Will someone who’s there walk away thinking Jesus is in this home?

These are important questions for all of us to ask ourselves regarding the kind of home that we have created. This week we will look at some of the issues that can make for a wonderful home life, despite the inevitable tensions and struggles that homes today face.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, June 22.

Learning From a King’s Mistake

Read the account of Hezekiah’s healing and the visit of the Babylonian ambassadors. *2 Chron. 32:25, 31; Isaiah 38; 39.*

Scripture points out that the messengers were interested in the miraculous recovery of King Hezekiah. However, Hezekiah seems to have been silent about his healing experience. He didn’t emphasize the things that would have opened the hearts of these inquiring ambassadors to the knowledge of the true God. The contrast between his gratitude for being healed in chapter 38 and his silence about it in chapter 39 is striking.

“*God left him to test him.*” This state visit was a most significant occasion; yet, there is no record of Hezekiah seeking special guidance about it in prayer from prophets or from priests. Nor did God intervene. Alone, out of the public eye, with no consultation with spiritual advisers, Hezekiah apparently let the work of God in his life and in the life of his nation recede from his mind. The intent of the historian in 2 Chronicles 32:31 may have been to show how easily God’s blessing can be taken for granted and how prone the recipients of His mercy are to becoming self-sufficient.

Below are some lessons about faithfulness in home life that can be gleaned from the experience of Hezekiah. What others can you think of?

Every visit to the homes of Christians is an opportunity for people to meet followers of Christ.

Few visitors are likely to open conversation about spiritual things. Christians must find ways that are sensitive and appropriate to the occasion to share the good news.

Christians are not called to show off their material prosperity or accomplishments, though they may recognize these as blessings from God. They are called to “declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light” (*1 Pet. 2:9, NIV*), or, to use Hezekiah’s experience as a symbol, to declare that they were dying, but Christ has healed them: they were dead in sin, and Christ resurrected them and seated them in heavenly places (*Eph. 2:4–6*).

In what ways are you able to use your home to witness to others? How could you share your faith in Christ more forthrightly with visitors to your home?

Family First

The most natural first recipients of our gospel-sharing endeavors are the people in our households. There is no more important mission field than this.

What conclusions can be drawn from **John 1:40–42** about sharing faith at home? See also *Deut. 6:6, 7; Ruth 1:14–18*.

An enthusiastic report. Andrew went beyond mere reporting; he arranged for his brother, Simon, to meet Jesus. An enthusiastic report about Jesus and an introduction to Him as a person—what a simple formula for sharing the gospel with relatives in our homes! After the introduction Andrew stepped back. From then on, Jesus and Peter had a relationship of their own.

Helping children to a place of faith. Children in a home can often be overlooked as fitting recipients of gospel-sharing efforts. Parents mistakenly assume children will simply absorb family spirituality. This must not be taken for granted. While children and young people learn from the modeling they observe, it also is true that these younger members of the Lord's family need individual attention and opportunity to be personally introduced to Him. Deuteronomy 6 is insistent on this point: Attention must be given to the most effective kind of religious education. Regular spiritual habits of personal and family worship are to be encouraged in the home. Time and earnest efforts must be put forth on behalf of children and youth.

What can we learn from the evangelistic efforts of Naomi? *Ruth 1:8–22*.

Ruth saw Naomi at the lowest of moments: when she tried to push her daughter-in-law away and when, angry and depressed, she lashed out against God as she recounted her losses (*Ruth 1:15, 20, 21*). No more eloquent testimony than Ruth's can be given to show that youth can meet and make a commitment to a perfect God, even when introduced to Him by an imperfect parent.

How does the notion of home as the most important mission field affect your attitude toward the people who live with you? Work together as a family to prepare a list of specific efforts your family can make to lead unsaved relatives to Christ.

Peace That Wins

What counsel does the New Testament have for marriages divided by religion? *1 Cor. 7:12–15; 1 Pet. 3:1, 2.*

The blessing of being a Christian partner. In 1 Corinthians Paul responds to converts' concerns that staying married to an unbelieving spouse might be offensive to God or bring defilement upon themselves and their children. Not so, says Paul. The sacred state of marriage and its intimacies are to continue after a partner's conversion. The presence of one Christian partner "sanctifies" the other partner and the couple's children. The word *sanctifies* should be understood in the sense that unbelieving spouses come into contact with the blessings of grace through living with their Christian partners.

Heartrending as it is, the unbelieving partner may decide to abandon the marriage. Though consequences will be serious, the merciful word of our God—who always upholds human freedom of choice—is "let him do so." The believer "is not bound in such circumstances" (*1 Cor. 7:15, NIV*).

Called to live in peace. The clear preference of the Word of God is that despite the challenges of a spiritually divided home, a way might be found for the peace of Christ to reign there. The hope is to keep the marriage intact, to give evidence of the triumph of the gospel in the midst of difficulty, and to promote the comfort of the partner with whom the believer is one flesh, though he or she be unbelieving.

What might be the limitations of a spouse's responsibility toward a nonbelieving partner?

Loving-kindness, unwavering fidelity, humble service, and winsome witness on the part of the believer create the greatest likelihood of winning the non-Christian spouse. Submission in a Christian marriage arises out of reverence for Christ (*compare Eph. 5:21*). When a spouse relates with Christian submission to an unbelieving partner, the first allegiance is always to Christ. Faithfulness to the claims of God on one's life does not require a spouse to suffer abuse at the hands of a violent partner.

Is someone in your church struggling with an unbelieving spouse? If so, in what practical ways could you possibly help?

Family Life Is for Sharing

In the following verses, trace the New Testament uses of the words “follow” (*KJV*) or “imitate” (*NIV*). What do they tell us about the process of becoming a Christian and growing as a Christian? What do you think they suggest about the relationship between modeling and witnessing? *1 Cor. 4:16, Eph. 5:1, 1 Thess. 1:6, Heb. 6:12, 13:7, 3 John 11.*

The New Testament emphasis on *imitation* acknowledges the important role of modeling in the learning process. People tend to become like whom or what they watch. This principle applies to relationships generally and especially in the home, where imitation is common. There children imitate their parents and siblings; married partners often imitate one another. This concept provides an important clue to how couples and families can bear Christian witness to other couples and families.

The power of social influence. We witness from our homes when we provide opportunities for others to observe us and to share in our home experience in some way. Many simply have no good example of marriage or family relationships to follow. In our homes they may see how the spirit of Jesus makes a difference. “Social influence,” wrote Ellen White, “is a wonderful power. We can use it if we will as a means of helping those about us.”—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 354.

As married couples invite other couples for meals, fellowship, or Bible study, or when they attend a marital growth program together, the visitors see a model. The display of mutuality, affirmation, communication, conflict resolution, and accommodation of differences testifies of family life in Christ.

In this context, however, of what must we always be careful? *Jer. 17:9, John 2:25, Rom. 3:23.*

Follow believers who follow Christ. All human examples are flawed; however, the witness of the Christian home is not about modeling absolute perfection. The New Testament notion of imitation is a call for individuals to follow believers who follow Christ. The idea is that individuals will grasp Christian faith as they see it demonstrated in the lives of others who are as human and fallible as they are.

What could you do to make your home a better model for Christian witnessing?

Centers of Contagious Friendliness

Compare biblical references on hospitality with actual incidents in the homes of several Bible families listed below. *Isa. 58:6, 7, 10–12; Rom. 12:13; 1 Pet. 4:9.* Note the attributes of hospitality that are demonstrated.

Abraham and Sarah (*Gen. 18:1–8*) _____

Rebekah and her family (*Gen. 24:15–20, 31–33*) _____

Zacchaeus (*Luke 19:1–9*) _____

Hospitality meets another person's basic needs for rest, food, and fellowship. It is a tangible expression of self-giving love. Jesus attached theological significance to hospitality when He taught that feeding the hungry and giving drink to the thirsty were acts of service done to Him (*Matt. 25:34–40*). Using one's home for ministry may range from simply inviting neighbors to a meal to the radical hospitality of lending a room to an abuse victim. It may involve simple friendliness, an opportunity to offer prayer with someone, or the conducting of Bible studies. True hospitality springs from the hearts of those who have been touched by God's love and want to express their love in words and actions.

Families sometimes complain that they lack the facilities, the time, and/or the energy to offer hospitality. Others feel awkward, unskilled, and unsure about reaching beyond what is familiar in order to associate with unbelievers. Some wish to avoid the complications to their lives that may arise from becoming involved with others. Many contemporary families confuse *hospitality* and *entertaining*.

In what ways does your home life reflect your own spiritual condition?

Further Thought: Ellen G. White, “A Powerful Christian Witness,” pp. 35–39; “Attitude Toward an Unbelieving Companion,” pp. 348–352, in *The Adventist Home*; “Ministry of the Home,” pp. 349–355, in *The Ministry of Healing*; “The Ambassadors From Babylon,” pp. 340–348, in *Prophets and Kings*.

The power of the home in evangelism. “Far more powerful than any sermon that can be preached is the influence of a true home upon human hearts and lives. . . .

“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.”—Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 352, 355.

Discussion Questions:

- 1 Ask anyone in class if it were the influence of someone’s home that helped them make a decision for Christ. Discuss just what it was that made such an impression. What can the class learn from that experience?
- 2 In what practical ways can you as a class minister to a family with an unbelieving spouse?
- 3 As a class, talk about some of the pressures in the home that work against faith. Write up a list of some of these things; then across from them, write down possible solutions.
- 4 The private lives of Christians are a means of witness to children, unbelieving spouses, other relatives, and visitors. While faith sharing at home may not always be as complete as one would like or result in the conversion of relatives and visitors, imperfect family members seek to point the way to a perfect Savior. Through generous hospitality expressed in the Savior’s name, they bring within the realm of grace all whose lives they touch. Think about the influence of your home on those who come to visit. What could you do to make it a better witness of faith for all who step within your doors?

Praising God With HIV

By ANDREW MCCHESENEY, Adventist Mission

Maria Samo has HIV and is praising God.

Samo was born into a Seventh-day Adventist family in the village of Nicuadala, Mozambique, and she got baptized at the age of seven. Her village had no high school, so she moved to Quilimane, a 30-minute drive to the south, to continue her studies. There she made new friends who introduced her to alcohol and tobacco.

Samo's parents didn't know that she smoked and drank until after she got married. Her father came to visit one day and walked in as Samo was smoking. He didn't say a word, but guilt washed over Samo, and she resolved never to smoke or drink again.

Quitting smoking proved easy, but drinking was much more difficult for Samo. She prayed for help. God answered in an unusual way, she said. She began to suffer severe panic attacks.

Fearing that she would die, Samo's husband took her to South Africa for medical treatment. A South African physician warned that she would die in three months if she didn't give up drinking.

Samo quit with the help of a 45-day rehab program and, returning to Mozambique, reconsecrated her life to Jesus.

Then her husband died. Six years later, she received the shocking news that he had been infected with HIV—and passed on the virus to her.

"From that time," she said with a smile, "I have been praising the Lord."

The reason is because she feels healthier than at any other time in her life.

"My health is better than it was before I contracted the virus, and my conscience is clear," she said.

Today, Samo, a grandmother of four, works as a trader, buying gold and precious stones in various villages and selling them in Nampula, Mozambique's third-largest city. But her passion is encouraging others with HIV.

"Many people lose hope when they learn that they are infected," she said. "They don't have anyone to talk to, and they die."

She said Adventists should have a special burden to reach out to those with HIV, praying with them and encouraging them.

"I share the hope that I have in Jesus and His soon coming," she said.



Part of the first quarter 2019 Thirteenth Sabbath Offering went to open an orphanage for children who have lost their parents to HIV and AIDS in Nampula. Thank you for your mission offering.

Part I: Overview

We've all heard of that illusive “silent witness” that we as Christians are supposed to be exuding everywhere we go. It causes people to line up and ask us, “What do you have that is different? I want some of that.” Then we tell them of Jesus, and conversions are soon to follow. No doubt, testimonies confirm that this phenomenon happens, but for the most part, if we are honest, this scenario is a kind of Christian urban legend that has left many Adventists waiting years for such encounters. In the meantime, guilt creeps in as one wonders why his or her “silent witness” is not loud enough to gain attention.

There is one place, though, where the effectiveness of the “silent witness” appears to have the greatest potential at drawing the world to press its nose against the window in curious admiration—that place is the Christian family. A Christian family that has so completely broken with the current model of two stressed-out, overworked parents, with their neglected, underdisciplined, overstimulated children, will stand out like a neon sign in the night. Parents in harmony with each other, children who cheerfully obey, a light spirit of happiness and contentment—all made possible by God's principles and presence—has an influence in today's world that is difficult to match.

Because families are relational units, Christ can shine through them in ways that create a unique witness. The lesson recognizes this potential and upholds the primacy of focusing on the family as the first mission field. It looks at concepts of *modeling* and *imitation* as methods of influencing others within and without the family. Finally, it considers hospitality as an influential interface between the Christian family and the world.

Part II: Commentary

Scripture

“And God said to them [the man and woman], ‘Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it’ ” (ESV). Quick quiz: Was the above verse spoken before the Fall or after? The text is Genesis 1:28; so, it was spoken before the Fall. The significance of the timing is that God's divine idea of family was planted in Eden. Though Eden is no longer home, when we participate in family we are connecting with an Edenic institution that has a way of calling us back to that Paradise. The family still retains the

echoes of Eden's glory. These echoes reverberate with God's kingdom and are harbingers of a new Eden more glorious than the first (*Rev. 21:1, 22:2*). This power is one reason godly families can have an almost mysterious draw on unbelievers. It may be the only glimpse of heaven they've seen.

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (*Gen. 1:27, ESV*). Together the man and woman, bonded in family, can display the relational dimensions of what God looks like. Thus, it becomes imperative that families make their own family a priority. Families bear the image of God. This potential invests them with sacred and incalculable value. There is no church program or outside responsibility that should interfere with the personal investment it takes to maintain a healthy and happy family. How many accounts must be shared from adults who gave all their time to church work only to lose to the world their own children, who testify of being neglected?

But someone might respond that family sacrifices are necessary for evangelism and the saving of souls. To implode that illusion forever, take note of the following account. Lee Venden tells of a conversation he had several years ago with a church leader who was, at the time, assistant to the president of the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists.

"We were talking about an extensive NAD survey taken in North America, the results of which left one feeling as though they had the wind knocked out of them. Probably the most startling revelation was that if, since the inception of the church, the ONLY growth in NAD membership had been biological, and if we had simply retained 80 percent of our own youth, the membership in North America at the time of that conversation would have exceeded 8 million" (excerpted from personal email correspondence with Lee Venden). Given that the current NAD membership is 1.24 million as of 2017, you can see how staggering this statistic is. That would equate to a more than 600 percent increase in NAD membership today.

In summary, given that love is both a core definition of God (*1 John 4:8*) and a relational term, it is understandable why humans in relationship have an advantage in displaying the image of God. A family originated before sin therefore could serve as a microcosm of Paradise past. In addition, when God's intentions are made a priority in family life, it can be a soul-saving influence in this world. Family life is incalculably valuable in these respects. But how can the world come in contact with these mini-glimpses of heaven on earth? Answer: hospitality.

Hospitality

What is hospitality? Dictionaries will say it is the friendly reception of guests or strangers. Providing guests with food, rest, and fellowship is

certainly a virtue practiced across the board and should be no less so in Christian populations. However, for Christians, there is an ever-abiding concern for people's souls, as well as for their physical needs. This concern will add nuance to the meaning and practice of hospitality in a Christian context.

First, the question arises: "Which guests or strangers are to receive a friendly reception?" This query sounds reminiscent of the question asked of Jesus: "'Who is my neighbor?'" (*Luke 10:29, NKJV*). It is helpful to make the connection between the two because Jesus' answer in the parable of the good Samaritan is an appropriate, though hard-to-swallow, twist on hospitality. The twist is that Jesus turns the question on its head. He prefers to morph the question from "What kind of person should you receive?" to "What kind of person are you going to be?" Along ministry lines and the above starting point that Jesus provides, Thursday of this week's lesson says, "Using one's home for ministry may range from simply inviting neighbors to a meal to the radical hospitality of lending a room to an abuse victim."

Zacchaeus is a case in point—a white-collar thief who receives the unexpected honor of Jesus (the famous prophet and rabbi) coming to his house for lunch (*Luke 19:5*). And what follows? Transformation, restoration, and "salvation" (*Luke 19:8, 9*)—no sermon, no Bible study, only a gesture of hospitality. (Note: This example is a kind of reverse hospitality, because Jesus invited Himself to Zacchaeus's house; but the principle holds because Jesus showed favor to a man whom society deemed a social outcast.)

When hospitality becomes an expression of God's grace to those who are outcasts, it has been reconstructed from standard cultural practice (i.e., "even the Gentiles do the same" [*see Matt. 5:47, ESVJ*]) to a moment with potential eternal significance. As the title of this week's lesson asks: "What have they seen in your house?" Well, nothing, if we haven't invited anyone. But if we have, the invitation itself can be like God's gracious call to all, regardless of their past or present condition. And if they see within the home a vibrant, otherworldly love shared between the family in the name of Christ, it may be enough to create in them an insatiable appetite for a new life and a new world.

Part III: Life Application

Many societies seem to invest high importance on education, career, upward mobility, rank, wealth, and perhaps even community service. Cultivating healthy families is rarely near the top of the priority list.

Sacrificing any of the top priorities for the sake of better quality time with family is almost unheard-of. As a result, the house may look good on the outside, but don't peer too closely inside, because the family may be in shambles. This state is to be avoided. The eternal lives of children and spouses are at stake, not to mention the surrounding community members who are watching and talking about the family in view. Here are some questions that can start the discussion of making family a priority for the sake of God's kingdom (and everyone's happiness).

- 1. At the end of Thursday in lesson 2, the profound question was asked, "How many people, at the end of their lives, wished they had spent more time in the office and less time with their family?" What can be done right now to avoid this circumstance from becoming the unfortunate testimony (office versus family) of your retirement years?**

- 2. Radical hospitality can involve safety concerns for the family. What kind of preparations could be made in such a situation?**

- 3. Hospitality can be expressed by the local church, as well as by the home. How might a church become known in its community for hospitality?**
