

Family Seasons: Lesson 7

Keys To Family Unity

Memory Text: “That they all may be one, as You, Father, are in Me, and I in You; that they also may be one in Us, that the world may believe that You sent Me” (John 17:21, NKJV).

Setting The Stage: Just because people live together doesn't mean they always get along. Being together doesn't mean everyone is together, or on the same page about everything. Someone wise said, “There can be union without unity: tie two cats together by their tails and throw them over a clothesline.”

Unity sounds so appealing. What comes to your mind when you think of the word? I think of peace; the absence of conflict.

Unity is not generally a place we arrive at; it is something we continually strive toward. Things change; we each go through new and different experiences simultaneously. Add to that people going through a particular season of their life, and a little sprinkle of fallen human nature, and the potential for disunity increases.

We live in a broken world. In society we get along, but we don't experience genuine unity. The success of any society and their communities lies in the success of the family unit. What we see in homes today is an index to future society. Although the future is bleak, there is only one ingredient that can bring true unity in the home and beyond, and that is the grace of God.

Sunday – Christ The Center

Ephesians 2:11-15; 2 Corinthians 5:17

What illustration does Paul use to describe the new unity that exists between peoples in Christ? How has Christ made “one” out of “two”?

Eph. 2:11-15. Paul uses the separation that once existed between Jew and Gentile and how the cross of Christ broke down that barrier to bring unity to illustrate the oneness that can not only exist between believers, but can also exist in families.

“Has it ever occurred to you that one hundred pianos all tuned to the same fork are automatically tuned to each other? They are of one accord by being tuned, not to each other, but to another standard to which each one must individually bow. So one hundred worshipers meeting together [or a family unit], each one looking away to Christ, are in heart nearer to each other than they could possibly be, were they to become 'unity' conscious and turn their eyes away from God to strive for closer fellowship.”

What practical changes does Christ bring to our lives that enable us to experience the oneness and unity we have been promised?

2 Corinthians 5:17: “Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; old things have passed away; behold, all things have become new.” (see also Eph. 4:24-32; Rom. 6:4-23)

“Picture a large circle, from the edge of which are many lines all running to the center. The nearer these lines approach the center, the nearer they are to one another... The closer we come to Christ, the nearer we shall be to one another.” (The Adventist Home, p. 179)

Monday – Becoming One Through Love

1 Thessalonians 3:12; John 13:35; 1 John 3:1, 16, 18

1 Thessalonians 3:12: “And may the Lord make you increase and abound in love to one another and to all, just as we do to you.”

John 13:34, 35: “A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another; as I have loved you, that you also love one another. By this all will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

Unity among His followers was often on Jesus’ mind. Experiencing genuine love is essential to genuine unity. Such love is God’s very nature (1 John 4:8), but is not natural to the sinful human heart. It comes into a person’s life as Jesus dwells with the believer by His Spirit (Rom. 5:5; 8:9, 11).

1 John 3:1, 16: “Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God... By this we know love, because He laid down His life for us. And we also ought to lay down our lives for the brethren.”

John knew what He was writing about. He was once proud, power-hungry, critical, and hot-tempered (Mark 3:17; Luke 9:54, 55; see also *The Desire of Ages*, p. 295). Later in life he remembered how Jesus had kept on loving him in spite of these traits. Jesus’ transforming love gradually changed John, enabling him to love others in Christian unity. “We love Him because He first loved us” (1 John 4:1), he wrote, and “if God so loved us, we also ought to love one another” (1 John 4:11).

1 John 3:18: “My little children, let us not love in word or in tongue, but in deed and in truth.”

He took his children (Helen & Brandon) to the local mall to do a little shopping. As they drove up, they spotted an eighteen-wheeler parked with a big sign on it that said, “Petting Zoo.” The kids wanted to go so he flipped them both a quarter before walking into Sears.

A few minutes later, he turned around and saw his 8-year-old walking along behind me. He was shocked to see she preferred the hardware department to the petting zoo. Recognizing his error, he bent down and asked her what was wrong. She looked up at and said sadly, "Well, Daddy, it cost fifty cents. So, I gave Brandon my quarter." Then she said the most beautiful thing. She repeated the family motto. The family motto is "Love is Action!"

She had given Brandon her quarter, and no one loved cuddly furry creatures more than Helen. She had heard and seen "Love is Action," and now she had incorporated it into her little lifestyle. It had become part of her.

Love always pays a price. Love always costs something. Love is expensive. When you love, benefits accrue to another's account. Love is for you, not for me. Love gives; it doesn't grab. Helen gave her quarter to Brandon and wanted to follow through with her lesson. She knew she had to taste the sacrifice. She wanted to experience that total family motto. Love is sacrificial action.

Read 1 Corinthians 13:4–8. Try placing your name where the word “love” appears. How well does it fit? Ask Jesus to bring these qualities of love into your life by His Spirit.

Tuesday – Selfishness: Family Destroyer

Philippians 2:3-5

Contrary to popular belief the antithesis of love is not hate, but selfishness. “For God so loved the world that He gave...” (John 3:16) Love is selfless and giving. Therefore selfishness is diametrically opposed to genuine love. If love promotes unity, then selfishness kills it.

“If pride and selfishness were laid aside, five minutes would remove most difficulties.” (Early Writings, p. 119) As human beings, our natures have been corrupted by sin. And, perhaps, the greatest example of that corruption is the curse of selfishness. We seem to be born selfish; we can see this reality in small children, whose basic nature is want for themselves. By the time we reach adulthood, this trait can manifest itself in some pretty terrible ways, especially in the home. Of course, Jesus came to change this (Eph. 4:24). His Word promises us that we, through Him, don’t have to be dominated by this destructive character trait.

Philippians 2:3-5: “Let nothing be done through selfish ambition or conceit, but in lowliness of mind let each esteem others better than himself. Let each of you look out not only for his own interests, but also for the interests of others. Let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus.”

Helping, cooperating, working together as a team, appreciating the other person, showing love and respect toward one another, watching out for the interest of

others, this is what it means to practice selflessness in the home. And when selflessness is practiced, then it will remove most difficulties.

Wednesday – Submission

Ephesians 5:21

Modern-day idolatry is expressed through self-worship in which absolute autonomy is the prized ethic: my importance, my desires, my preferences, my ambitions, and my way of folding clothes or doing dishes are all non-negotiables. “As long as I’m not hurting anyone else,” this ethic exclaims, “I can do what I want.” And, of course, one can do what he or she wants; but one can’t just get what one wants if Christian maturity, loving relationships, and family unity are anywhere on the horizons.

Submission. Not a very popular word today. For some it conjures up images of oppression. For others it means weakness. How you view this word can be intimately connected to your experiences. However, submission, mutual submission, is a key ingredient to all healthy human relationships.

Ephesians 5:21: “Submitting to one another in the fear of God.”

Mutual submission doesn’t make any sense according to the world’s views (where submission only takes place when a subordinate yields to a superior). In fact, even Christians have a hard time with this idea. But the message of the Bible is clear.

Submission is not the same as obedience or doing someone else’s will, and it is certainly not weakness. Someone offered this definition of submission: “The voluntary surrender of one’s rights or will in response to the purposes and actions of God.” Relatives of submission are humility and love, by which we are willing to give ourselves in love to others. Submission never lowers.

The gospel says that we submit to others as an act of love and service. Any act of submission that is not in accordance with the gospel’s understanding of love and service is invalid.

But this issue raises a couple of questions: **How can a person lead if they are submitting to people’s requests? How can any of us submit when the actions or requests of another person are wrong?**

- Submission doesn’t mean that every request has to be honored.
- Nor should wrong be ignored or tolerated. Jesus certainly didn’t tolerate wrong or become a doormat acquiescing to every request.
- Yet at the same time, He was willing to submit to the point that He died on the cross.

True submission always lays opinions and rights aside to honor God. Most difficulties in relationships revolve around the unwillingness of one or both to

surrender their preference, pride, or their right to be right. If we didn't think so highly of our own opinions (not principles) there would be more peace in more marriages and relationships.

Thursday – Living The Love We Promise

Exodus 2:1-10; Genesis 45:1-8; Ruth 1:16-18; Hosea 1:2, 3, 6, 8; 3:1-3

Ultimately, family cohesion and unity rest on the commitment of family members, beginning with the commitment of the marital partners, to care for one another. Sadly, Bible history is strewn with examples of failed promises, broken trust, and lack of commitment where it should have been present. Scripture also has stirring examples of ordinary people who, with God's help, committed themselves to friends and families and kept their promises.

Parent-child commitment (Exod. 2:1–10). The parents of Moses were so committed to the preservation of the life of their son that they risked their own lives to protect his. They didn't quit their commitment when times got difficult.

Sibling commitment (Gen. 45:1-8). Joseph forgave his brothers for selling him into slavery. His commitment to them was never shaken in spite of their treatment of him,

Family commitment (Ruth 1:16–18). Ruth's desire to stay with her mother-in law reveals a level of commitment to the welfare of a non-blood relative is rarely seen today. But Ruth's love for Naomi deepened her commitment to her.

Marital commitment (Hos. 1:2, 3, 6, 8; 3:1–3). This must have been a very hard thing for Hosea to do, but his commitment to the marriage vows and his growing love for his wife led him to faithfully be the husband Gomer need to him to be, so in turn Gomer could learn to love and trust a man after having exposed herself to the vilest of men.

When we commit ourselves to another person, as in marriage or in the decision to bear or adopt a child, there is a willing surrender of our freedom to make a different choice in the future, a surrender of control over an important segment of our lives. Laws may restrain negative behavior, but marriage and family relationships need love within them to enable them to flourish.