



West-Central Africa Division

Family Ministries & Publishing Department

FAMILY LIFE IMPACT WEEK OF PRAYER

February 9 - 16, 2019



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**General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventist Church
WEST-CENTRAL AFRICA DIVISION**

FAMILY LIFE IMPACT WEEK OF PRAYER

FEBRUARY 9-16, 2019

INTRODUCTION

You are welcome to **FAMILY LIFE IMPACT WEEK OF PRAYER**. This week is also for preparation towards World Church Impact Day coming up on **April 20, 2019**. The rationale for this is that you need to receive the blessings in this material first before sharing with others because you cannot give what you do not have. The taste of the pudding is in the eating. All hands should be on deck. All departments of the church are to use this week for in-reach and out-reach. Speakers are to be carefully and specially selected.

PREFACE

Developing a healthy family is among the most challenging tasks human beings can undertake. Even when people are intentional about having healthy relationships in their families, it is still challenging—despite our best intentions—because we are all human, and every human being is imperfect. Our failings make it very difficult to sustain healthy relationships.

However, there *is* hope for today’s families. Things can get better. Our children can grow up and become positive and vibrant human beings. We can learn to overcome negative attitudes. As you embrace God’s reasons for creating the family, it is possible to have stronger and healthier family relationships.

METHODOLOGY

Various methods for conducting this week of prayer is being proposed in order to accommodate all classes of church members and special guests.

1. Traditional method—all members come together in their local church.
2. Small Group—Action Unit, or House Fellowship.
3. Office Group—Two or more members within office proximity.
4. Business Group—Two or more members within business proximity.
5. WhatsApp/Face Book Group—Some church members can connect through WhatsApp/Face Book/Phone to conduct the week of prayer. Share your daily reading experience with someone who you are committed/responsible to.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Reserve some minutes for group discussion on suggested questions following the reading or any related question in line with the topic of the day. Couples can share their experience of

how God helped them to overcome potential conflicts or trying time. Your testimony can help someone.

SUGGESTED OBJECTIVES OF EACH GROUP LEADER

1. Each group member gets the material—hard or soft copy
2. Each group member reads the material
3. Share testimonies and prayer requests
4. Pray for one another and pray for requests from other sources
5. Encourage each member to donate books for distribution during impact day
6. Encourage each member to participate in the mass distribution of Missionary Book on the IMPACT Day
7. Encourage members to continue to share Missionary Book to their friends, neighbors, work mates e.t.c. after IMPACT Day.
8. Write reports and inspiring testimonies about the week of prayer and IMPACT Day
9. Encourage each group member to participate in the exercises in the appendix.
10. Discuss how best to improve on the prayer program and Missionary Book distribution.
11. Singles are encouraged to read the chapter ***Finding Peace as a Single Person*** in the main text book.

NOTE

Each group leader is encouraged to read the entire book ***The Power of Hope***, from where the week of prayer reading was extracted. This will give him/her deeper insight and additional information to share with the group.

PRAYER

Church leaders are praying for you that this week of prayer will bring abundant blessings to all families. There are suggested prayer requests for each day. Solicit for prayers from group members. May God heal all homes that are in distress and sustain those that are flourishing.

DAY 1—The Family: God’s Invention

KEY BIBLE TEXT: GENESIS 1:27, 28

Family is a wonderful word that stirs up warm feelings in most people around the world. It is the first thing people think about when in danger and also when there is something good to share or celebrate. Family is the first thing in our thoughts after being away for school or work for a period. Most people think about wanting to hug loved ones and enjoy the familiar surroundings of home after being away for some time. The truth is—after God—family is consistently the most significant group of people that makes us feel safe, secure, and warm.

The experience of family did not happen by chance. Family was God’s plan for the human race from the very beginning of time. It is the group from which we get our identity, our name, and our traditions. Family are the people we have a long-term relationship with, and, frequently, we feel the most comfortable with them. Family is almost always where we get the inner driving force that influences our goals and aspirations, and even our sense of well-being—who we really are or who we want to become.

Genesis 1:27, 28 describes the beginnings of the family like this: “So God created man in His own image; in the image of God He created him; male and female He created them. Then God blessed them, and God said to them, ‘Be fruitful and multiply; fill the earth and subdue it.’ ”

The Bible shares in the first chapter of the first book that God created the family, emphasizing the high importance this basic unit in society has for God, and consequently should have for us.

Despite God’s plan for the happiness of the family, we all know things have not always worked as well as they were supposed to. Husbands and wives often do not get along. The marriage that was meant to last until death often ends in divorce—or the relationship doesn’t even get to marriage before giving birth to children, separating, and causing lots of pain. Parents and children are often angry at each other. Parents feel disrespected, while children feel controlled or abandoned by the ones who were supposed to be taking care of them.

These experiences are often confusing because what we anticipated would bring a sense of happiness, warm feelings, and security has been the complete opposite for many people in our world today.

In the face of disappointment and distress we are pleased to share that there is hope for today’s family. The hope is in taking another look at the principles God meant for people to follow so that their families could be what He created them to be. Beyond just taking a look, putting these principles into practice enables us to experience the joy, warmth, and peace that family was designed to bring.

The truth is that there are no perfect families because there are no perfect people. So when we talk about a family that feels connected, we are not talking about a family without any problems. Rather, we are describing a family that enjoys relatively high levels of satisfaction and stability among its members. A family that is connected in a healthy way—spouses, parents, and children—are intentional about managing conflict in a timely manner and are committed to being patient, kind, understanding, and forgiving. While this kind of commitment is not easy, it is worthwhile and will contribute to the happiness, health, and quality of life of every family who puts it into practice.

For families to make it through the years with a high probability of success, it is important for family members to be committed to making it through each day—one at a time. Every member of the family must be purposeful about getting along with each other in meaningful ways every day—listening to each other, practicing being patient with each other when doing the opposite is so much easier because it comes naturally.

Family specialists often say that the quality of a family depends on the quality of their communication. Trying to grow a strong family relationship without healthy communication is like attempting to make grape juice without grapes. It is simply impossible. Healthy communication is the primary skill needed for maintaining a strong sense of family. The closer the family relationship becomes, the more caring and respectful the communication must be. Stephen R. Covey, a leading family expert, shares in his book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families*,¹ the concept “be proactive” as a skill to be used for effective communication. In essence, the idea indicates that between a stimulus and the response—what someone says to you, and how you respond—there is a space. And in that space each family member has the freedom and power to choose their response—what they say, and how they say it. And that response is truly at the foundation of their growth and happiness as a family. For this concept to work so a family is able to communicate effectively, however, the skill has to be practiced so that it can be learned. To be sure, three things *must* happen in the space between what a family member says to you and how you respond:

1. You must *pause*—instead of responding immediately to what your father or mother, daughter or son, husband or wife is saying, allow yourself to calm down.
2. You must then *think* about what you should or should not say.
3. You must *choose* the correct response; what will bring peace, rather than war, to the situation at hand.

The quality of your family life will have much to do with the quality of your communication. Families who speak with each other regularly and lovingly experience a level of closeness that families who rarely or unkindly communicate with each other can never achieve.

It takes determination to build a great family. But anything that is worth doing is worth doing well. So, make the commitment to communicate well, and watch your family blossom and grow in the days, weeks, months, and years ahead.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you sincerely think that our families can be described as healthy ones?
2. What can we do to develop stronger and healthier families?

Prayer points:

1. God be God in our homes.
2. Good communication among family members.
3. God to bring back love, respect, forgiveness, unity, and happiness in our homes.

DAY 2—Marriage God’s Way

KEY TEXT: JAMES 1:9

To celebrate our thirtieth marriage anniversary and create new memories to keep our marriage healthy and strong, we spent five days at the beach, enjoying the beautiful sand and clear blue water.

Our time at the beach was simply wonderful. We relaxed, read books, enjoyed good food, swam, snorkeled, and went body-boarding and kayaking; but the most unforgettable of all our activities was learning to sail.

As our sailing lesson began, we quickly realized there was much more difficulty to this sport than one could see on the surface. While a bit stressful, it was also relaxing, challenging, and rewarding. In our sailing lesson it soon became obvious that we would need to work together as a team and be on the same side of the sailboat to experience gliding smoothly across the beautiful Caribbean waters.

God created marriage and family to give human beings the needed community to feel connected. While the process has challenging moments, the rewards are out of this world.

The Bible is full of good counsel to help us negotiate our family relationships for maximum joy. The more we read the Word of God ourselves and with our spouse, the more we will be in tune with what God wants for us and for our families. The truth is, it is impossible as humans always to protect love from harm or hurt. However, as we apply God’s Word to our family relationships, we can find the capacity to honor God in our relationships. This can take place, however, only as we make the time to be with each other and grow together through the power of God.

We love to spend time together—just the two of us. Now that we’ve been married for more than thirty years and have had the privilege of working together, we have all kinds of favorite activities and places to visit. We are simply grateful that God brought us together, and we try to apply the counsel we find in the Bible to our marriage relationship every day. One of our favorite verses that we like to apply to our communication with each other is found in James 1:19, which says: “Every- one should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry” (NIV).

God’s plan for marriage is more easily fulfilled when married couples use a concept called *the emotional bank account*. The emotional bank account is like any other bank account. You can make withdrawals from an account only when it has funds in it. And we all know what happens when we make more withdrawals than deposits from our bank accounts. We end up with insuf-

ficient funds when we write a check from that account.

The same is true of your marriage relationship. If all you do in your marriage is take, take, and take, without contributing to the well-being of your spouse first, you can't expect to get anything out of your marriage relationship. When you are kind to your spouse, you are making deposits in their emotional bank account. The more emotional deposits you make in the emotional bank account of your spouse, the *richer* your relationship will be. The reverse—trying to get more than you give—leads to a bankrupt relationship.

So, how are you doing with deposits in the emotional bank account of your spouse? Are you kind, patient, supportive, encouraging, and forgiving on a regular basis? Or are you cynical, impatient, critical, demanding, difficult, and offensive? Regardless of how difficult your marriage relationship has been, you can turn things around if you make up your mind to begin doing things differently. Rather than approaching your marriage from the angle of what you can get, start looking at your marriage from the perspective of what you can give. Then watch your spouse's emotional bank account grow and grow until your relationship is bursting with the currency of good will for each other. The following six behaviors can help any couple get their marriage's emotional bank account back on track. Couples who are willing to try at least one of these suggestions will most likely see improvement in their relationship immediately:

Stop labeling your marriage as dysfunctional!

The human brain is wired to believe what we tell it. If you keep saying your marriage is dysfunctional, you will begin to believe it. We like to tell people to ask themselves, "Do I have a good marriage with some dysfunctional times, or do I have a lousy marriage with a few good times?" It's a case of the proverbial, "Is the glass half full or half empty?" Couples who are willing to find the good in their marriage and in their spouse will be able to more easily resolve conflict and have a more satisfying marriage. So start telling yourself that you have a great marriage, and you and your spouse will begin to believe it.

The truth is, any marriage can be turned around if the couple believes in it and is willing to commit to making their marriage grow stronger. God's Word is true when it declares, "If you can believe, all things are possible to him who believes" (Mark 9:23).

Pray with all your heart for your marriage and your spouse

God, the Creator, invented marriage. Therefore, it is not only wise but also essential to keep Him at the center of your marriage. We don't mean just paying lip service to this; we mean

establishing and maintaining a meaningful relationship with God and constantly acknowledging His presence as individuals, and also as a couple. Ask God to heal your marriage, and then expect a miracle. God “is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us” (Ephesians 3:20). We also tell couples if they believed God is present while they are speaking to one another, would they really say some of the things they say to each other? Or would they be more inclined to impress God with how kind, patient, loving, and forgiving they are? Especially as you ask God every day to forgive you for your sins and to favor you with His grace

and mercy, how can you do less for your spouse? God promises that if we humbly seek Him when we pray, he will hear us, forgive us, and heal our brokenness (2 Chronicles 7:14).

Learn and practice effective communication skills

This may seem really obvious and instinctive. But, the truth is, this is not inborn or easy at all. While we have all learned to communicate since birth, most of us have developed flawed or incorrect methods of communication. We learn how to communicate in our families of origin and we bring those patterns—good and bad—into our marriage. In addition, what worked well in our homes or with our friends may not work in our marriage, with our spouse. Each partner needs to be willing to make adjustments in their own relational and communication styles in ways that can enhance the quality of the relationship. Most disagreements happen in marriage because couples are talking over each other and neither partner has stopped to listen to the needs, wants, and hurts of their spouse.

A fair number of problems in marriage are not really problems. Many issues can be resolved by taking the time to listen to each other and to seek genuine understanding. We are back to the wisdom found in James 1:19, about being quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to be angry.

Find out what your spouse likes and do it, and keep doing it—and, find out what your spouse doesn't like and quit doing it! Prior to marriage couples take great care in being their best selves—the best boyfriend or the best girlfriend. They go out of their way to find out what the other person likes, to shower them with their heart's desires. After the wedding and the honeymoon period, however, they think they no longer need to do special things for each other. Of course, this change makes your spouse feel taken for granted. This is when you hear people say they married the wrong person. It isn't so much that they married the wrong person. Rather, each one just stopped being the right person. To make matters worse, they begin to irritate each other by doing the very things they know their spouse dislikes.

If couples would employ the golden rule of Matthew 7:12, “so whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them” (ESV), they would literally watch their marriages flourish and grow exponentially.

Forgive often

In marriage—the most intimate relationship— couples will experience hurt¹ from time to time.

Thus, couples will need to learn to forgive each other. Sometimes one partner hurts the other unintentionally. There are also times when people wound each other by saying offensive and nasty things to retaliate for pain they may be experiencing. Some injuries can be easily ignored, some are a little harder to forgive, and others leave deep and lasting scars.

Forgiving someone who has harmed you is the hardest part of loving, and yet you cannot continue to truly love without doing it. Forgiveness is not about becoming a doormat to be trampled upon, absolving others from responsibility, or simply forgetting. Still, forgiving actually helps begin the process of healing from your hurts and from the need to punish the other person. It also pushes you toward restoring the fracture in the relationship. And, through God’s power, you will be able to give the gift of forgiveness to your spouse. Romans 5:8 offers, “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” (ESV).

Laugh a lot

The old adage “Laughter is good medicine” still rings true today. In fact, medical research has found that laughter has physiological and neurological benefits. Laughter helps reduce stress, stimulates the immune system, reduces blood pressure, bonds couples together, and keeps the relationship fresh. We tell couples to find things to laugh about and stop stressing about the small stuff. Again, many issues couples have in marriage are simply idiosyncrasies. Nevertheless, they, too, can learn to laugh at unintended misunderstandings. Proverbs 17:22 shares, “A merry heart does good, like medicine, but a broken spirit dries the bones.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- *What is emotional bank account?*
- *What are some things couples can do to get their marriage’s emotional bank account back on track?*

PRAYERS OF COMMITMENT

- *Pray for a better understanding / relationship between couples.*
- *Pray for the spirit of forgiveness between couples and between one another.*

DAY 3—Parenting for Success

KEY BIBLE TEXT: 1 JOHN 4:16, 18, 19

Raising children today is more challenging than ever. Shaping a child's character is even more urgent as children are confronted daily with values that seem opposite from their parents' values. Today children are bombarded with mixed messages through the media, internet, other adults, and their peers. These confusing messages have led children down a path that desensitizes them to many societal ills such as violence, immorality, abuse, and discrimination.

The statistics on teen homicide, bullying in schools, school shootings, suicides, and drug and alcohol abuse reflect significant changes to the nature of childhood. Thus, it is much harder for children to learn basic lessons of self-management, self-esteem, and empathy toward others. Children today are more prone to depression, anxiety, and impulsive behavior. At the same time, there are more economic pressures on parents, who are working harder and longer hours, leaving them less time to spend with their children.

In spite of these challenges, parents are still the best protection against children participating in risky behaviors such as drug and alcohol use, premarital sex, and eating disorders. Parents who daily take an active role in raising their children will eventually reap the rewards of seeing their children grow into healthy and responsible adults.

Parenting is one of the most important and challenging tasks given to human beings. Consider the significance of raising a child who will not just be obedient but will grow to have a mature character and a healthy self-esteem, manage their emotions, and have healthy relationships with others. Parenting is of the utmost importance.

Of course, there is no such thing as a perfect parent. However, by God's grace our children may grow up to be fine adults, despite having had parents who were less than perfect. On the same note, parents should not expect their children to be perfect either. In the rest of this chapter, we share some ways in which parents can lay a solid foundation to carry out the task of raising their children successfully.

It is important for parents to understand what their values are and how to transmit them into their children's character.

Let's begin with an understanding of what *values* are. Values are important beliefs shared by the members of a culture or family about what is good and what is not. Values wield major influence

on the behavior of an individual and serve as rules or guidelines in all situations. Some fundamental moral values are honesty, integrity, respect, and responsibility for others.

The character is how values are activated.

Character is not what we say—it is who we are. It is how we live out our values. So, if you tell a child that honesty is an important value in your home but you tell her to tell the person who has just called on the phone that you are not home when you are obviously at home, then your child will internalize that honesty is not an important value. Character is observable in a person's behavior. Remember, values are our beliefs—it is more philosophical—while character is active.

Character is made up of foundational values we mentioned earlier—honesty, respect, kindness, empathy, and responsibility. When these qualities are part of a person's character, one can expect to witness them regularly and consistently in the person's behavior. When these values become a part of a child's character, you would not expect them to change as the child interacts with different people or in different situations.

Again, because no one is perfect, there will be times your child may not exhibit these traits of character. However, the more the preferred values are reinforced, the more they will become a part of your child. Hence, parents must also strive to live by these values. On that point, someone once said that your child may not do what you say; they are more likely to do what they see you do.

The term *emotional intelligence* has become one of the most popular phrases of the new millennium. In fact, psychologists have found that emotional intelligence, or EQ, is a better predictor of a person's success in life than IQ. They have discovered that EQ leads to happiness in all aspects of life—work, career, and relationships. So, what is emotional intelligence, or EQ? EQ is the ability to control one's emotions. It is being aware of your emotions and having the ability to manage these emotions even in the most stressful of situations.

Parents must become emotion coaches and become involved with their children's feelings.

Parents can become emotion coaches for their children by following these steps:

1. Become aware of your child's emotions. All emotions are an opportunity for a closer relationship with your child and for teaching.
2. Listen sincerely to your child. Parents must learn to listen to their children and validate their feelings. Your attitude toward your children is essential in helping them become emotionally intelligent and responsible adults. Make sure that your language is not critical, judgmental, or blaming.

3. Help your children find ways to label the emotions they are feeling. Sometimes your child may yell, hit, or stomp, and this is normally interpreted as anger. However, most times these fits of anger are just expressions of what your child is really feeling. Instead of getting angry at your child and yelling and screaming, ask the child what he or she is feeling and provide feeling words such as *sad, frustrated, embarrassed, shy, upset*.
4. Set limits while exploring solutions to the problem at hand. Children need parents to set clear limits that are age appropriate. Children rely on this guidance in both childhood and adolescence. Children begin asking for independence from very early on; however, the parent who gives independence without limits is not doing the child a favor. Rather, this creates havoc and insecurity for the child. On the other hand, a parent who is too controlling and does not allow a child to exercise some independence hinders the child's development. Children must be respected, acknowledged as having a point of view, and given opportunities to make choices.

Knowing about values, character, and emotional intelligence is one thing, but how do parents help children move from thinking to doing? How do we help our children turn nouns such as *generosity, kindness, thoughtfulness, sensitivity, forgiveness, and compassion* into action verbs? Children do not acquire emotional intelligence or good character by memorization of rules and regulations. A list of good qualities and virtues will be as quickly forgotten as they are memorized; but when children get to practice what they have learned, the concepts become a part of them. As values are internalized, being *good* becomes a part of your child's identity.

To parent for success, parents must understand several truisms and apply them to their relationship with their child or children. As parents, you must first and foremost understand that respect is at the core of morality—respect for self, for others, and for the Creator of the universe. As a parent, you must respect your children and expect them to respect you in return. If you want to raise responsible children who have your values, you must treat them as human beings.

Parents, remember that actions speak louder than words. Children observe everything their parents do. They file it away and later imitate how the significant adults in their lives live, what they do, and how they treat those around them. Modeling is a very effective teacher. But remember, modeling is not about perfection. It *is* about letting your children see your commitment to moral ideals or Christian ideals. It is also about modeling what moral people do when they have made a mistake. It is saying you are sorry. It is about talking to your children about your struggles to *live* the way you *believe*. If you are a Christian and you believe in Christ, it is essential for you to show your children how to live like Christ did when He walked on this earth.

Parents must let their values be seen and heard. For maximum impact, not only must they be

taught the values, but they need to know the reasons and beliefs that lie behind them. Parents need to guide, instruct, listen, and advise.

Make love the foundation on which you build every aspect of your relationship with your child or children. The New Testament says, “God is love” (1 John 4:16). It is God’s love that we reflect to our children. Children need to be rooted and grounded in love, the kind of love that God bestows upon us as unconditional love. The kind of love that does not require anything in return. This kind of love helps our children develop a positive self-concept, a sense of worth, an inner strength. The love that we are speaking about is active, not passive.

This kind of love teaches children to love themselves and to love others. Children—or adults—who do not feel loved have much difficulty loving themselves, and in turn they have difficulty loving others. Children need to know they are being heard and that they are important enough for you to devote your full attention to what they have to say. This makes them feel loved. There are no shortcuts in parenting, not even for busy parents. The *quality* of time does not make up for minimal *quantity*. Healthy families structure their schedules, however busy and hectic, to spend time together eating, working, and playing. The bottom line is this: Parenting takes time.

Parents must foster an I-can-do-it attitude by encouraging their children to try new things. You must learn to celebrate successes and reframe *failures* as simply *tries that teach us what does not work*. A child who receives much more praise and appreciation than criticism and blaming will grow to have a positive self-image. Supportive parents help their children to develop a sense of themselves as capable and competent persons who can stand up for what is right and who do not need the approval of the group at any price.

Children who feel supported are less susceptible to negative peer pressure. When parents set the foundation for positive and healthy development in their children’s lives, then children will have the best chance of becoming the persons God intends them to be. Your child or children will be able to choose right when faced with tough decisions; they will not be easily swayed by other’s opinions. Not only will they find that a strong character coupled with emotional intelligence benefits them personally, but they will also be a benefit to the family, church, and society as a whole because they have been given the essential building blocks for living a healthy life.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- ***Enumerate few points of what parents can do to increase the probability of being successful in parenting their children?***
- ***What are the best methods parents can adopt for transmitting Christian values to their children?***
- ***True or False: It is possible to have perfect parents and perfect children? Discuss.***

PRAYERS OF COMMITMENT

- *Pray that God will grant all parents grace not to neglect important assignment of parenting their children for heaven.*
- *That God will grant all our children special grace to imbibe correct/good values.*
- *That God will help all parents to succeed in parenting their children.*

DAY 4—Rock or Sand?

KEY TEXT: MAT 7:24-27

There were delays that made the flight that was to arrive Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire from Paris an hour before midnight, to be late by four hours. At the Abidjan airport a driver by name Charles was waiting patiently for his guests who finally arrived at about three o'clock in the morning. Instead of an absent driver or one that is tired, the guest rather found a very kind driver with a pleasant disposition, who drove them to where they were to lodge. Their conclusion about Charles' behavior was that his parents or guardians must have instilled those values in this driver at his childhood and he had responded by obeying them.

Christ's Sermon on the Mount presents eternal values that is to be practiced by all who would be His followers and citizens of God's kingdom. According to the conclusion of this sermon in Matt. 7:24-27, those who believe and do the sayings are compared to one who built on the rock, while those who hear without a commitment to doing what God asks them to do, are compared to one who built on the sand, and they cannot live happy lives.

Knowing and doing God's requirements are two entirely different realities. Applying this to the issues of family life, the commandment on adultery is expanded to cover the wrong motive – looking at a woman lustfully (Matt. 5:27, 28). Another issue is that of divorce which may be allowed only on grounds of adultery (Verse 32).

Paul in 1Cor.13:1-8 presents the love that should be applied for a happy marriage and family life which if practiced would guarantee long lasting marriage. Many today seem to have forgotten that God established marriage at the very beginning of human history. In Gen. 2:18, marriage was to provide companionship for the good of man. Later in verse 24 of the same chapter God declared how this Divine institution was to be entered into. Lest one would think it to be an Old

Testament issue, Christ gave a reminder in Matt. 19:5 and Mark 10:7, 8 respectively. Paul cited the same in Eph. 5:31. It is clear from these Bible texts that God's intention for marriage was for it to be the closest, and most intimate relationship humans should have. The use of the singular "husband and wife" to describe marriage reveals that it was meant to take place between one man and one woman. Any departure from this model does not support God's model at Eden. The 'oneness' in Gen. 2:24 was to take care of loneliness, be a blessing, bring joy and goodness to humanity. Unfortunately, Satan, assisted by husbands and wives who have lost sight of God's objective for this institution are helping to destroy it. In the Bible are laid solid principles of morality and decency. Building one's marriage and family on these principles is like building on the rock, while just talking and not doing or building on your own opinions or those offered by loose morals constitute building on the sand.

This same principle applies to the singles as well. The Bible serves as a compass that will lead the single safely to a successful end in life's journey. The single is empowered by the word of God to make right choices that can be likened to building on the rock- a building that withstand the storms of sexual urge, and other temptations. Any other building on human opinions is like building on sand, which cannot withstand the storms of life.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- *How can we ascertain where we are building our families—on the rock or on the sand?*
- *Discuss how the husband or wife should not cooperate with the devil in destroying their marriage?*
- *What are some benefits couples can derive by building on the rock?*

PRAYERS OF COMMITMENT

- *Pray for God's grace to overcome cultivated and inherited tendencies that can ruin our families*
- *That God will help all of us to build our families on the Eternal Solid Rock.*

DAY5—Becoming Intimate Allies

KEY Text: Matthew 19:6

INTRODUCTION

Someone has said, “Getting married is easy. Staying married is more difficult. Staying happily married for a life time would be considered among the fine arts.” It really does not take a genius to accept the reality of this statement. Take a good look at the people around you, those you associate with each day, you will quickly realize how true this statement is. Even if you have been married for only a few months, you have already experienced how challenging it is to stay married, let alone to stay happily married! The question remains, how do you develop and maintain an intimate relationship with your spouse, and how do you become allies?

WHAT INTIMACY MEANS

When we refer to intimacy here it is not what most of you are thinking about right now. The intimacy we are talking about is simply a closeness that every married couple needs to develop emotionally, financially, spiritually, and intellectually. While physical intimacy is very important in marriage, if a couple does not experience the intimacy we are talking about today, they may not truly experience the intimacy needed to make their union last long and stand the test of time.

According to the Dictionary definition of intimacy, “An affectionate bond, the strands of which are composed of mutual caring, responsibility, trust, open communication of feelings and sensations as well as the non-defendant interchange of information about significant events.” Here, the couple develops a relationship with each other so closed and united. Married people who are allies are very closed emotionally, financially, spiritually, and intellectually, and they tend to support each other when faced with a challenge.

Ellen G. White states:

However carefully and wisely a marriage may have been entered into, few couples are completely united when the marriage ceremony is performed. The real union of the two in wedlock is the work of the after years. ¹

The truth about marriage is that regardless of how long two people have known each other before getting married or how compatible they seem to be, because we are all sinners and fundamentally selfish, our marriage relationship will naturally lead to a state of alienation and separation.

¹ Ellen G. White, *the Adventist Home* (Nashville: Southern Pub. Assoc., 1952) p. 205

But the good news, however, is that husbands and wives can become intimate allies. Our marriages can grow. We have choices. We can learn to live with what is wrong which ultimately lead to contempt, resentment and isolation or we can make a commitment to have a great marriage. The best choice we can make to become intimate allies is to be intentional about connecting with each other every day through the power of the Holy Spirit. **Matthew 19:26** says, “**With men this is impossible, but with God all things are possible.** Being intimate allies

means being so emotionally, financially, spiritually, and intellectually connected with your spouse with nothing to hide from each other.

This means you have decided to trust each other which happen only when you trust each other. When the Bible talks about oneness in **Genesis 2:24**, is truly a mystery which means that one person becomes subsumed under the personality of the other. Rather there are two distinct persons with their own likes and dislikes, who have chosen to become an “**us**” so that when one of them hurts, the other hurts; and when one of them is happy, the other is also happy because they have chosen to be intimate allies.

BARRIERS TO INTIMACY

What we know from marriage Researchers is that there are barriers to the oneness that needs to take place between couple, in order for them to become intimate allies. Among these barriers are behaviors such as:

- *Self protection*
- *Fear of rejection*
- *Lack of knowledge*

As we grow up we tend to protect ourselves. That sign of insecurity pushes us to fear rejection whenever someone has an opinion different from ours. This reality is the root of selfishness. We want things to be done exactly what we want. This makes it difficult to experience an intimate relationship. We don't know how to communicate effectively; we are ignorant of the crises management skills. Hence, becoming intimate allies is impossible when these barriers exist in our marriage relationships.

HOW TO ACHIEVE INTIMACY IN OUR MARRIAGES

To experience intimacy in our relationship,

Firstly, we must accept the oneness which is one flesh experience the Bible speaks about. This should be a mutual agreement between the husband and wife. This should be seen in all areas of life-emotional, financial, spiritual, intellectual, and physical.

Secondly, couples should be committed to stay with their spouses in permanent relationship until death. ***Divorce is never the solution***. God hates divorce because it separates and hurts people. Abuse and infidelity causes mistrust and kills permanence in relationship. These must be avoided at all cost.

Thirdly, couples should practice openness which means transparency in their communication. It is a no shame relationship. This creates an environment of safety because husband and wife understand clearly that they had nothing to hide.

CONCLUSION

Becoming intimate allies is a decision you make with your spouse to be patient and kind with each other, protect each other from any foreign entity that seeks to diminish and destroy the

relationship. Being intimate allies is a mind-set you nurture every day so that your marriage can be one that brings happiness, fulfillment, and contentment. This is the kind of relationship we wish for everyone to have-Amen

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- *What are the disadvantages and advantages of having an intimate relationship?*
- *What are the barriers that hinder intimacy in our relationships? How can we get rid of these barriers?*
- *Is it possible to create an intimate relationship in our marriages? How can we do it?*

PRAYERS OF COMMITMENT

- *Prayers should be offered for couples who are experiencing some turbulence in their marital life*
- *For all families to experience Intimacy in their relationship*

DAY 6—Communicating With Grace

KEY TEXT: PRO 25:11

People who are intentional about communicating well with their loved ones experience great family relationships. If you think about the people you really like in your family, you would easily admit that the ones you like best are the ones who make you feel good because of the way they speak and listen to you.

A friend of ours told us a story about joining a group of runners from his neighborhood who run five miles every day. After returning from running one day, he was excited about the fact that the second half of the run took less time than the first half. Because he has been concerned about getting back in shape and being healthier, he was feeling good about his improvement in running and mentioned it to his wife when he returned home. Without thinking, she said to him: “The reason you were able to run faster the second half is because most of the trail is downhill on the way back.”

Oh my! Our friend felt like someone had punched him in the stomach. Instead of receiving the affirmation he was looking for from his wife—after all the hard work he was putting into his physical exercise—he felt invalidated by the thoughtless response he received from her.

If you want your family relationships to be healthy and positive, it is important to learn to communicate with grace.

When we say *grace*, we are talking about the spiritual concept that refers to the unmerited favor and love freely given by God to humans. Grace is something we do not deserve. In the same way God forgives our shortcomings even when we do not deserve to be forgiven, to communicate with grace means to speak with someone in a way they do not deserve.

The Old Testament says in Proverbs 25:11, “A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver.”

This is how families can create a life of peace and happiness together, by using words as precious gifts of gold and silver they can give to each other every day, even when a loved one may not deserve it. Can you think of someone in your family with whom you need to use grace in your communication? This is an

easy question for most of us to respond to because a large percentage of the world's population have a relative they have a difficult relationship with.

In an earlier chapter, we mentioned the concept presented by Dr. Stephen R. Covey, to “be proactive” for effective communication. This idea encourages people to live within what he calls their “Circle of Control,” rather than living in what he calls their “Circle of No Control.” When you live in your Circle of Control, you spend most of your time controlling the only person you can really control—yourself. This is the opposite of living most of your life in your Circle of No Control, which is where people spend most of their time trying to control others. People who are proactive live their lives in their Circle of Control and are more likely to communicate with grace than individuals who spend their lives in their Circle of No Control.

The truth is you cannot control your spouse, your children, your siblings, your parents, or your relatives. You truly can control only yourself. So when someone says something to you that is not very nice, rather than using your energy trying to change them, it is much more profitable to use that time developing your response of peace and grace. As we have mentioned before, between what someone says to you and your response, there is a space. So, before you respond, remember to do three things in that space: pause, think, and choose.

When someone says something to us we don't like, we tend to respond quickly and in a similar manner. However, to communicate with grace— to respond in a way they do not deserve—you need to be proactive, to live in your Circle of Control, to *pause*, so that you have time to catch your breath before saying something that will cause equal pain or make things worse. In that space— before your response—you also need to *think* about what you should not say and what you should say to make things better. Finally, you need to *choose* the correct response. The correct response is the one that will calm things down rather than adding fuel to the fire. This is what it means to use words as gifts of gold and silver.

Individuals who give little thought to building healthy family relationships live in their Circle of No Control. Rather than making careful choices about how they respond in their conversation with a family member, they blame the other person for starting the fight and feel justified in insulting the other person. These individuals respond in a reactive way rather than choosing to be proactive. They

do not take the space between what the other person says and their response and do not consider the consequences and impact their response will have on the relationship. Therefore, they do not pause, they do not think, and they do not make good choices for the health of their relationship with the family member in question.

People often tell us it is too difficult to live being this careful not to hurt the feelings of their loved ones. They say it is not normal. That people simply need to quit being so sensitive. That pain will inevitably happen when we communicate with others.

While in some ways this is true, family relationships as well as other relationships are similar to driving a car. When we get to a red traffic light, we stop. What would feel natural is to keep driving to get to our destination more quickly and without interruptions. However, because we are not the only ones driving on the roads of the cities or towns where we live, we have to be mindful of sharing the road with other drivers who are going in different directions.

Traffic lights are present to help all drivers get to their final destinations safely. If we are patient enough, we all get an opportunity to get to where we are going. If we are not careful to give attention to the traffic lights placed in strategic locations, we will most likely run into other cars, potentially hurting ourselves and others, perhaps even causing a fatal accident because of our lack of attention and concern.

Family relationships are very fragile, and the conversations you have in those relationships need great care. If you are intentional about being careful and nurturing in your family relationships, those choices will help keep your relationships safe and avoid hurt feelings that may lead to the death of a relationship.

So, what is the responsibility of the husband with hurt feelings? Does the fact that his wife said something to cause him pain give him the right to say something to hurt her back? Of course not. In fact, this is his opportunity to communicate with grace. To respond to his wife in a way that she may not deserve. That is the true meaning of grace. Here is where the husband needs to live in his Circle of Control and be proactive. Here is where the husband gets to pause, to think, and to choose the correct response, to keep his marriage relationship healthy and strong, despite what his wife said.

It is true that because we are all human, even if we don't mean to hurt one of our family members on purpose, we will predictably say something or do something that causes them pain. When this happens, it is our opportunity to apologize; this is her opportunity to live in her Circle of Control and take responsibility for what she did rather than blaming the other person for being too sensitive. This is where the wife can say that she is sorry for causing her husband emotional pain, even if that was not her intention. Here is where the wife can decide to pause, think, and choose the correct response to help build a stronger and healthier relationship with her husband.

The wisdom of the New Testament is also very practical and helpful when looking for effective ways to communicate with grace. We shared this with you earlier, and we want to share again what James 1:19 says: "Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry" (NIV).

So while some may be thinking that women or children should be the ones quick to listen and slow to speak, the wise counsel from the Bible is that "everyone should be quick to listen, and slow to speak." Which means, no one in the family is without responsibility to communicate well, to communicate with grace. And, often, communicating well begins by learning to listen well to enhance all of our family relationships.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- *In some society, people respond quickly to issues to prove how intelligent they are. Should this be applicable in the home in particular and in the public in general.*
- *If there are couples in the congregation, let them take few minutes to discuss how they are fairing in their communication.*
- *Is it really true that we cannot control others? What of the manager and those working under him/her?*

PRAYERS OF COMMITMENT

- *That God will help each one of us to improve in our communication skills at home.*
- *Pray for couples/homes where communication has broken down.*
- *Ask for additional prayer requests from participants.*

DAY 7—No Excuse For Abuse In The Family

KEY TEXTS: EPH 5:28, 29. 6:4

In February 2013, people around the world were watching their televisions closely to hear the verdict in the trial of Oscar Pistorius, the famed Paralympic and Olympic Games runner. He was found guilty of shooting to death his girlfriend Reeva Steenkamp; he claimed he mistook her for an intruder in the apartment they shared.

Clearly, we don't have to look far to know that violence has invaded our society, and there are many cases all over the world that will never make the headlines.

Families are being torn apart by senseless violence right in their own homes as many people choose violence as the primary means of communicating with each other.

While we may not be able to control the violence around us, the good news is that through the power of God, there is an unlimited supply of self-control available to those who request and accept it.

In this chapter, we will briefly look at the destructive nature of violence and abuse in the family, and we will review God's original intent and perfect plan for our relationships and families. We will also explore the elements of healthy, godly relationships.

Unfortunately, in too many situations, abusers have misused Scripture and theology to justify their abusive behaviors. In addition, other well-meaning helpers have also misused the Bible to convince victims to accept continued violence in their families. This misuse of Scripture can be dangerous and even lethal to the victims involved. Responsible communities can no longer remain silent.

Silence continues the cycle of domestic violence and does not lead to change. Efforts must be made by every community—especially church communities—to

help families stop abuse and assist in creating healthier environments for children, teenagers, and adults.

Many people are the target of violence. The victims that most touch our hearts are women and children. It is true that men are also victims of abuse and violence, but in smaller numbers—which may be due to lack of reporting. Regardless of who the victim is, domestic or family violence is incompatible with God’s plan for the human family.

Let’s first look at some definitions and general information about domestic violence. Domestic violence includes physical abuse, sexual abuse, and emotional abuse. There is no hierarchy of abuse—each one is destructive.

Physical abuse may include behaviors such as pushing and kicking, and it can escalate into more harmful attacks. While it can start with minor bruising, it could end in murder.

Sexual abuse can include inappropriate touching and verbal remarks. Rape, molestation, and incest are also included in this category.

Emotional abuse includes behaviors that consistently degrade or belittle the individual. It can include verbal threats, episodes of rage, obscene language, demands for perfection, and invalidation of character and person. Extreme possessiveness, isolation, and depriving someone of economic resources are all psychologically and emotionally abusive.

There is no real profile of abusers or victims. Both may come from all age groups, ethnic groups, socioeconomic classes, professions, and religious or nonreligious communities. Abuse and violence may take several forms: physical, sexual, or emotional. In the case of the elderly and children, it may also include severe neglect.

The victims

- In the United States of America, one in four women will experience domestic violence, also known as intimate partner violence, during her lifetime.¹

3. Women are more likely than men to be killed by an intimate partner.

4. Women between the ages of 20 and 24 are at the greatest risk of becoming

victims of domestic violence.²

5. Every year, one in three female homicide victims is murdered by her current or former partner.³ The consequences
5. Survivors of domestic violence “face high rates of depression, sleep disturbances,” and other emotional distress.⁴
6. “Domestic violence contributes to poor health for many survivors.”⁵
7. “Without help, girls who witness domestic violence are more vulnerable to abuse as teens and adults.”⁶
8. “Without help, boys who witness domestic violence are far more likely to become abusers of their partners and/or children as adults, thus continuing the cycle of violence in the next generation.”⁷
9. Most incidents of domestic violence are *never* reported.⁸ In domestic violence, there is always misuse of power. Domestic violence is characterized by fear, control, and harm. One person in the relationship uses coercion or force to control the other person or other family members. The abuse can be physical, sexual, or emotional.

There are several reasons why abusers or batterers may choose to abuse their power:

- He thinks it is his right; that is, part of his role.
- He feels entitled to use force.
- He has learned this behavior in his past.
- He thinks this behavior works. In most reported cases of abuse the abuser is male. However, abusers can also be female. Abuse has no place in healthy, godly relationships. Abusers assume they have the right to control all members of their family. The willingness to use violence to accomplish this control is from things that he has learned. From various sources, the abuser has learned that it is appropriate for the person who is

bigger and stronger—usually a male—to hit others “for their own good” or because he “loves them.” Abusers learn abusive behavior from various sources, including observing parents and peers, misinterpretation of biblical teachings, and from the media—jokes, cartoons, and movies—that portray control and abuse as a normal part of

relationships. And sometimes victims even think they are the cause of the abuse. But this is not true. The behavior of the victim does not cause the abuser’s violence. The abuser is in control of the violence; the victim is not.

These facts are not pleasant and remind us of the brokenness of the world we live in. The good news and hope for today’s families is that God has not left us alone. The Bible presents the true picture of how human relationships should look. Human beings are created by a loving and relational God who created us to be in relationship with Him first and then with others. Because we are created in His image (Genesis 1:27), all of our relationships should be a reflection of Him and His love. Of course, unlike God, we are not perfect, and because of these imperfections we will struggle in our relationships. Therefore, we must seek God’s guidance for grace and strength to be more loving, kind, and patient and to exercise self-control in all of our relationships.

God has provided a way for us to have healthy relationships. We are called to build each other up; this is called empowering. When we empower one another in the family, we build high trust in the relationship. When we misuse power by dominance and coercion, we tear down trust. Trust is the key in the empowering process.

Parents who empower their children and prepare them for responsible interdependence will provide their children with the skills necessary to live as healthy adults and to build and maintain healthy relationships. When parents use unhealthy forms of power and control with children, the children detach from their family and learn negative ways of using power and relating to others.

Empowerment is love in action—a godly characteristic we should imitate. If we are able to practice empowerment in our families, it will revolutionize the view of authority in our homes. Coercion and manipulation are the opposite of empowerment. They are a distortion of what true power is. Empowerment is about mutuality and unity.

God's love and grace gives us the power to empower others. When mutual empowerment occurs among family members, each will grow exponentially in humility and love. Truly, family members will begin to grow more into the likeness of Christ. And His power is promised to us as we seek to have healthy relationships.

Many today find themselves outside of this model of healthy family relationships. In homes where abuse has infiltrated, we encourage you—starting today—to strive toward making your home and relationships abuse free. We beg you to recognize the abuse and to seek counsel and professional help as soon as possible to begin the healing process. This step will bring greater hope to your family today.

Discussion Questions

1. Do you think that violence and abuse do occur also in the Seventh-day Adventist families?
2. How can your church break the silence and deal with the issue of abuse in the families in your local church?

Prayer Points

1. God's interventions in different families that are experiencing violence and abuse
2. For all abuse victims for their restoration and support
3. Our churches to become agents to prevent violence and abuse in families

DAY 8—How to Prevent Marital Distress and Divorce

KEY TEXT: 1 Cor 13:4-8

Weddings are beautiful, delightful, and blissful occasions. When a couple stands at the altar, holding hands, gazing into each other's eyes, reciting their vows, they are filled with joy and hope. Every couple believes their love is so special and their bond so strong that they will remain together “in sickness and in health” and “for better or worse.”

The reality is that most couples will end up on one of three paths: couples who flourish, couples who are conflicted, or couples who quit. In the United States and in many countries of the world, 40 to 50 percent of first-time marriages will eventually end in divorce.¹ What happens to the vows of staying together “until death do us part”? Is it that those making the vows did not take them seriously? Or is there a lack of true understanding of what the vows really mean?

As many couples hear about the high failure rate of marriage, they water down their marriage vows by adjusting the words found in traditional vows. Some vows now say, “as long as we both shall love” instead of “as long as we both shall live.” It would appear that some couples are setting their expectations lower just in case they are not able to live up to such a high level of commitment.

It does not take careful observation to realize that marriage, as an institution, has taken a big hit around the world. Everyone knows someone or is related to a couple who has experienced divorce. And in countries where there is no legal divorce, many couples are separated, live separate lives while occupying the same home, or live with high levels of distress. To be sure, most of us have lived through, either firsthand or up close, the pain of strained relationships.

With this daunting reality, how does a couple stay happily married for a lifetime? How does a couple in today's society build a marriage that lasts a lifetime or live “happily ever after”? Is it possible to prevent distress and divorce? Well, the good news is that couples can stay happily married for a lifetime, minimize distress, and stay out of the divorce courts.

Most of us have heard about or have experienced firsthand *falling in love*. At least that is what our society calls it. That giddy, butterflies-in-the-stomach rush of feelings we get when we meet someone we are powerfully attracted to—but this is not really love. Rather, it is just the body's natural response to the neurochemicals that are being pumped into the limbic system of the brain when we meet someone that we find attractive. We prefer to call it *falling in like*.

Another truth is that this giddy response is not sustainable with the same person unless we are intentional about connecting positively on a daily basis. The powerful force that connects us at

the beginning begins to wear off once we stop doing all the wonderful things we did at the beginning of the relationship and we have to negotiate the daily cares of life. People have been brainwashed to believe that when the romantic feelings dissolve, they have fallen *out of love*. With much effort, time, commitment, and willingness to keep going, it is possible to grow and sustain—or reignite—a love that can be satisfying and stable for a lifetime.

Psychologists and other scientists are discovering that humans are wired to intimately connect with another human being. People have the need for trust, safety, and security with someone who is not a part of their family of origin. Isolation, which is the opposite of closeness is dangerous to our well being.

Building a successful marriage is like building a home. It requires a plan and commitment to a lot of hard work. We offer five essential building steps for a strong and healthy marriage.

1. Build your marriage on real love

Real love requires understanding each other's needs and being willing to sometimes practice self-denial for the sake of the relationship. Real love requires much energy and sacrifice but keeps us determined to create the best marriage possible. Please read 1 Corinthians 13:4–8.

2. Accept each other's faults and imperfections

In marriage, we must learn to value each other and accept that we are not perfect. We are talking about having a marriage filled with grace. Grace is something that you give to someone even if they do not deserve it. So you give kindness, patience, gentleness, and more; even when you do not feel like it. Why? Because at some point—even daily— your spouse will have to do the same for you.

The wonderful thing about grace is that you cannot earn it or buy it. And as the giver of grace, you get to offer love and acceptance as a gift to your spouse. Grace in the marriage creates an atmosphere that goes beyond guilt and shame and sets the stage for growth and renewed commitment in the relationship.

3. Listen to each other

A large body of marriage research literature suggests most relationships experience distress because of the lack of effective communication. If married people, and people in general, learned to communicate better, they would have much more understanding between them and a basis for a stronger and healthier relationship.

Good communication in any relationship is like water and sunshine is to a healthy lawn. Good

listening is like the fertilizer that will go deep beneath the surface to nourish and enrich the soil. In most relationships when there is a complaint, it is because some needs are not being met—voices are not being heard. Couples who communicate well understand that active listening is an essential ingredient in their marriage.

Active listening means listening with your ears, eyes, and heart. It conveys to your spouse that you are more interested in hearing what they have to say than defending yourself and stating your point. Again, active listening necessitates self-denial, another essential ingredient for marriage to last for a lifetime.

When each person in the marriage feels heard and understood, the couple draws closer to each other, intimacy increases, and commitment to one another and the relationship is strengthened.

4. Forgive often

The Oxford English Dictionary (1989) has this definition of *forgiveness*: (1) to stop feeling angry towards (someone) for an offense, flaw, or mistake; (2) no longer feel angry or wish to punish; (3) to cancel a debt.

Forgiveness paves the way for healing and reconciliation in every relationship. In marriage, both individuals will inevitably hurt one another. When we forgive, we give up our perceived right to punish or retaliate for the wrong that has been done to us. When we fail to forgive, bitterness and resentment increase in the relationship. Forgiveness releases us from these feelings. Forgiveness in essence is for the forgiver more than for the forgiven.

5. Hug more

Most couples can hardly wait to get married to enjoy the physical benefits of marriage. But as daily life takes over and the giddiness wears off, we forget to do the things we did at first. Hugging is an easy way to reconnect daily. When we hug or touch each other, the hormone oxytocin is released. Oxytocin is the hormone that increases our bond to another person; it also lowers blood pressure and reduces stress. So, there are many benefits we can glean from a simple hug. We encourage couples to hug for a minute every morning before parting from each other, and every evening when they are reunited.

Conclusion

What separates successful marriages from those that consistently experience distress or end in divorce are relational skills—knowing how to sustain real love, manage conflict, practice forgiveness and acceptance, maintain romance, and improve communication. Most couples are not

adequately prepared for this, but every couple can learn! It is dangerous to become complacent or foster hopelessness in your marriage.

Couples who learn to work together as a team during good times and bad times will see their marriage not only survive but thrive, and they will “live happily ever after”!

DISCUSION QUESTIONS

- *Mention five essential building steps for a strong and healthy marriage.*
- *Discuss how couples can become active listeners during conversation.*

PRAYERS OF COMMITMENT

- *Pray that God will help to stem the rate of divorce in our church and society.*
- *Pray for all couples that are distressed and in conflict.*