

10. Little Times of Trouble (2Q 2019—Family Seasons)

Biblical material: Matt. 7:5; Eph. 1:7; Phil. 2:4–8; Eph. 4:26, 27; James 1:19, 20; Col. 3:19; Matt. 7:12.

Quotes

- In every conceivable manner, the family is link to our past, bridge to our future. *Alex Haley*
- In each family a story is playing itself out, and each family's story embodies its hope and despair. *Auguste Napier*
- The place of the father in the modern suburban family is a very small one, particularly if he plays golf. *Bertrand Russell*
- Govern a family as you would cook a small fish—very gently. *Chinese proverb*
- Your folks are like God because you want to know they're out there and you want them to approve of your life, still you only call them when you're in a crisis and need something. *Chuck Palahniuk*

Questions

How do these “little times of trouble” end up being so big? What do we learn from being part of a human family? How does this relate to our spiritual life? What do our family relationships tell us about God? How is it true that “families teach us what life is all about”? What is the basis for such relationships? What of the wider issues in the great controversy?

Bible summary

We are told not to be hypocrites (Matt. 7:5). We are saved and forgiven (Eph. 1:7). Phil. 2:4–8 tells us we need to have the same attitude as Jesus. Don't stay angry (Eph. 4:26, 27 and James 1:19, 20). Husbands are called to love their wives (Col. 3:19). Do to others what you'd want them to do to you (Matt. 7:12).

Comment

In this study we need to be very aware of how we treat each other in families, and not to allow little things to become big arguments!

Proverbs 3 reminds us that God disciplines us like a loving Father. In fact, not to act when it is necessary is not love, but indulgence, and can prove very detrimental. But surely the best imagery to be brought in here is Hosea 11, which describes God's agonizing over his children, trying to teach them and give them the best, and yet being rejected and put down. As we deal with problems in our families, we need to be aware of the need for rules and mutual respect, of love and commitment.

When we think of God and his character, we should consider what kind of God he truly is. He is always working for our good, even though like children we may fail to see this. And like children, we may not be immediately teachable and willing to listen, and like a wise parent God will wait and work for us to be ready so that he can help when we do choose to listen and respond.

Micah 6:8 supplies the corrective to legalism on the one hand and laxity on the other. For God does “require,” but this is the requirement of relationship. Learning from

our family relationships should help us to learn about our relationship with God and with each other as we seek to demonstrate the truth of God to the world.

How do we see mistakes causing problems down the line? David is a good example. After his sin with Bathsheba became known, he lost moral authority in the nation and in the family. While he called out for mercy and forgiveness in the Psalms (see Psalm 41 and 51 for example), he no longer had a voice of authority. It's true that sin is a terrible sickness of the soul, and God is the only one who can heal us, but consequences remain.

So how do we deal with family troubles? Sometimes it may seem like parents are only saying, "Do as I tell you, don't ask questions!" While it is true that you cannot explain *everything*, are we not representing God when we try to explain and gain understanding? Of course it all depends on your concept of God. If you see God as gracious and winsome, wanting to encourage trust and understanding, you will try to follow such methods. If on the other hand you see God as authoritarian, demanding unthinking obedience, then your parenting may use different approaches. See how even such daily interactions with your children depend on your spiritual life, your connection with and understanding of the true character of God.

Dealing with issues in the family can be problematic. While we may want to accomplish the command of Matthew 18, our success is surely dependent on permitting choice and freedom—even with our children. Jesus makes it clear (John 8:31) that to be his disciples we must follow his teaching. In reviewing all that Jesus said, it becomes clear that he wants no mindless obedience but thinking acceptance and agreement with his principles. Only then can we be what he is truly looking for: followers and children who identify and live out the values of God's character and government for ourselves. Otherwise we may be obedient servants, but not really understanding friends.

The "love principle" is foundational, and as has been observed before, truly is a principle and not an emotion. The hard choices based on caring, self-giving love are rarely spur-of-the-moment emotional decisions, but the results of deep reflection and thought on the essentials of God's kingdom. That's what we need to share with our children, as God indeed shares with us, his children.

Ellen White Comments

Tell the poor desponding ones who have gone astray that they need not despair. Though they have erred, and have not been building a right character, God has joy to restore them, even the joy of His salvation. He delights to take apparently hopeless material, those through whom Satan has worked, and make them the subjects of His grace. He rejoices to deliver them from the wrath which is to fall upon the disobedient. Tell them there is healing, cleansing for every soul. {COL 234.1}

The family relationship should be sanctifying in its influence. Christian homes, established and conducted in accordance with God's plan, are a wonderful help in forming Christian character. . . . Parents and children should unite in offering loving service to Him who alone can keep human love pure and noble. {AH 19.6}

Let every family seek the Lord in earnest prayer for help to do the work of God. Let them overcome the habits of hasty speech and the desire to blame others. Let them study to be kind and courteous in the home, to form habits of thoughtfulness and care. {AH 438.4}

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