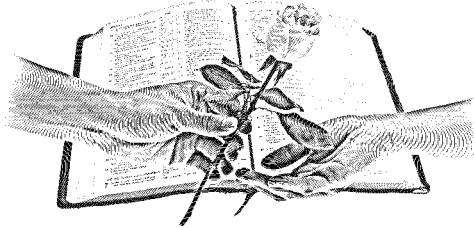


# Homes of Peace and Healing



## SABBATH AFTERNOON

**Read for This Week's Study:** *Ps. 37:8, Matt. 5:22, 12:1-14, 18:15-18, Mark 7:6-13, Phil. 2:1-16, Col. 3:12-15.*

**Memory Text:** “Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid” (*John 14:27, NIV*).

**The Week at a Glance:** The Bible gives us principles that, if applied, can help minimize family conflict and turmoil.

The schoolchildren were trying out a new seesaw. The bigger and heavier kids moved closer to the center; lighter riders stayed out at the end. Once everyone was balanced, each child got a good ride. Things went fine until some mischievous bigger boys seemed to get pleasure from bouncing girls in the air like rag dolls until they screamed to get off. Then kids started piling on at opposite ends, each side trying to outweigh the other. Before long, the seesaw, the toy that had been the setting of so much fun, became a painful place. No one wanted to ride on it anymore.

Family life is sometimes like a seesaw. Life is more pleasant when people respect and care for others. Sadly, individuals experience pain when some use their status or position in the family to dominate, control, or treat others harshly. This week's lesson looks at ways relationships run into difficulty and how God, in His Word, provides insights that help His children move from hurt to healing.

*\*Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, March 4.*

## Saints Have Family Problems Too

*“Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace” (Eph. 4:3, NIV).*

Christian believers possess by faith the precious spiritual reality of being seated in heavenly places with Christ (*Eph. 2:6*). In daily life, as they await His return and their removal from the presence of sin, some tension, discord, even conflict may occur. This is a part of the human experience with intimate relationships (*Gal. 5:17*). Friction can come, because people differ widely in disposition, habits, education, and ways of looking at things. Families must find ways to respect the individuality of each member yet be able to function and enjoy life as a close-knit group. The mark of healthy Christian relationships is not only keeping conflicts to a minimum but surmounting in ways that accord with the gospel, those conflicts that do come.

**How** does the Bible teach God’s people to deal with the conflicts that may arise among them? Summarize the principles in **Matthew 18:15-18, Philippians 2:1-16, and Colossians 3:12-15.**

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Christian love and tolerance enable many families to cope with great differences. Others find themselves in uncomfortable situations that must be remedied if unity and peace are to be maintained. Without resolution—anger, hostility, and distance may develop in the relationship. Facing conflict can be difficult; many avoid or shy away from it, deny it exists, or withdraw emotionally. Others determine to get their way at any cost, while many simply give in to keep peace.

**Think back over family struggles you either have experienced or seen. What caused them? How might they have been more easily resolved? How could the principles seen in today’s text have made a big difference?**

**Key Text:** *Romans 12:18*

### Teachers Aims:

1. To show how maintaining peace in the home can bring about harmony.
2. To understand that anger is a natural emotion that can be controlled when surrendered to Christ.
3. To show that Christians should display emotions that are not abusive.

### Lesson Outline:

#### I. Peace in the Home (*Eph. 4:26, 27*)

- A. Families can experience harmony by maintaining peace in the home.
- B. Anger must be surrendered to Christ and controlled in order to maintain peace and harmony.
- C. Resolving conflicts right away can allay anger.

#### II. A Home Atmosphere Free From Abuse (*Rom. 13:10; 1 Cor. 13:4, 5;*)

- A. Physical, emotional, and sexual abuse should not be found in a Christian home.
- B. Destructive behaviors can be changed through forgiveness, a willing heart, and the power of God.
- C. Those who are motivated by love will seek to do no harm to others.

**Summary:** Harmony and peace can be found in the Christian home when family members express love and forgiveness. This can be done by controlling anger and by resolving conflicts immediately.

## COMMENTARY

### I. Introduction

While our homes should be homes of peace and healing, and while we desire to live by biblical principles, it is sometimes all too easy to let our selfishness, upbringing, gender differences, personal choices, and ignorance in dealing with conflict stand in our way.

### II. The Best of Intentions

Some believe that Christian couples and families should always get along; but even with the best of intentions, our humanity gets in the way. Scott Stanley suggests that “part of reaching Christian maturity is accepting the reality of our imperfection while striving to become holy. Truth is, we will never perfectly understand another person this side of heaven, even when we are doing all the right things. The important thing is to take responsibility for your own behavior, even when your partner doesn’t seem to want to get along.”—Scott Stanley, et al. *A Lasting Promise: A Christian Guide to Fighting for Your Marriage* (San Francisco, Calif.: Jossey-Bass, 1998), p. 95.

## Putting Anger in Its Place

Scripture plainly condemns angry attitudes and behaviors that are destructive to individuals and relationships (*Gen. 49:6, 7; Ps. 37:8; Matt. 5:22; Gal. 5:19-21*). These belong to the “old man,” whom Christians are called to “put off” (*Eph. 4:31, Col. 3:8-10*). However, the Bible acknowledges that anger as an *emotion* is part of life in Christ (*Eph. 4:22-27*).

Anger sounds an alarm inside us when inequity or injustice is recognized or when there is oppression of the innocent. Moses felt this emotion in defense of God’s name and cause (*Exod. 32:19*); Jesus did, too, when His ministry, the Sabbath, and the man with the withered hand were all treated with coldhearted indifference by the religious leaders (*Mark 3:1-5*). Injustice aroused anger in David and Nehemiah (*compare 2 Sam. 12:5, Neh. 5:6*). Jacob loved Rachel (*Gen. 29:30*) but became angry when he felt accused unfairly by her (*30:1, 2*).

**What** do you think “In your anger, do not sin” (*Eph. 4:26, 27, NIV*) means for believers?

❶ “In your anger do not sin” indicates that the emotion of anger and sin are not one and the same. The feeling of anger is not sin in itself. Family members are to give each other permission to have this emotion and to report it without guilt.

❷ “Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry” (*Eph. 4:26, NIV*) indicates that anger is to be processed promptly. Final resolution of issues may take time, but anger can often be diffused by a “soft answer” (*Prov. 15:1*). “Soft answers” are caring responses that result from listening, accepting the person, and recognizing the deeper feelings such as fear, frustration, or hurt that triggered the anger. Getting behind the anger like this helps families clear things up and grow closer to each other.

**Some people tend to blow up the instant they are angry; others hold it inside, where it seethes and festers. What is your own tendency, and what promises can you find in the Bible that can help you toward a more Christlike resolution of your anger?**

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Two concepts seem central to this topic, “Seek First to Understand and Then to Be Understood” and “Begin With the End in Mind.”—Stephen R. Covey, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective Families*, pp. 70, 201.

The lessons this quarter suggest that family life is like a seesaw. Life is more pleasant when people respect and care for others, but there also can be pain when a family member desires to dominate and control others in the relationship.

Most married couples report four main areas that cause problems. Ask your class what they think these four areas are. They are money, communication, children, and sex. Other things couples commonly argue about are in-laws, recreation, alcohol and drugs, religion, careers, and housework.

In considering the question at the end of Monday’s study, we should remember that we always do not know the reality behind some of these areas and that we all make assumptions. We may not know the whole story, because we have not openly discussed what really is taking place.

Anger often is not well-understood. Anger is a secondary emotion, meaning that it grows out of fear, hurt, or frustration. An angry outburst is a symptom of at least one of these underlying emotions.

Issues of abuse are addressed in this week’s lesson, as well as in next week’s, so you may want to use the following information this Sabbath or next Sabbath. For a child, sexual abuse is one of the most traumatic acts of betrayal. It is defined as “the engaging of a child in sexual activities the child does not understand, to which the child can’t give informed consent, which are developmentally inappropriate and/or which violate the laws or taboos of society” ([http://www.andrews.edu/IPA/education/adolescent\\_health/Child\\_Abuse/sld002.htm](http://www.andrews.edu/IPA/education/adolescent_health/Child_Abuse/sld002.htm)). Sexual abuse says to children that they are not loved or valued for themselves.

It is also important to understand that when a person is sexually abused, he or she is emotionally and physically abused. There is practically nothing else that can do more harm to a child’s picture of God as a heavenly Father than being abused by an adult—especially an adult who is that child’s primary caregiver.

In discussing these issues this week and next, some in your class may want to draw a line, either yes or no, when it comes to physical punishment. In relation to Ellen White’s statement in *Child Guidance* (p. 250), read the entire chapter in preparation for class.

Appropriate forms of punishment are a sensitive subject for Christian parents. Those with adamant beliefs generally are not looking for someone to convince them otherwise. Valuable insights and time will be lost if your class debates what is right or wrong.

Forgiveness is rare, because our human hearts desire justice. Blinded by our own hurt, we typically flee or fight, both common human responses. R. T. Kendall suggests that “the ultimate proof of

## Anguished Hearts

Unthinkable as it is, research reveals that the home is the single most violent place in society. Family violence touches all kinds of families, including Christian homes. Violence is an assault of any kind—verbal, physical, emotional, sexual, or active or passive neglect—that is committed by one person or persons against another in the family.

**The Bible includes accounts of family violence, even among God’s people. What are your thoughts and feelings as you read these verses? Why do you think these stories were preserved in Scripture?**

*Gen. 37:17-28*

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*2 Sam. 13:1-22*

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*2 Kings 16:3, 17:17, 21:6*

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**Though people today don’t burn their children on altars to pagan gods, what are some modern parallels to this same practice?**

Abusive behavior is the conscious choice of a person to exercise power and control over another. It cannot be explained or excused by alcoholism, stress, the need to fulfill sexual desires, the need for better control of anger, or any behavior of the victim. Victims are not responsible for causing the abuser to abuse. Abusers distort and pervert love, for “love does no harm” (*Rom. 13:10, NIV*). Professional treatment can facilitate change in an abuser’s behavior but only if the person takes responsibility for the behavior and seeks such help. To those who will open themselves to His presence, God “is able to do exceedingly abundantly” to help abusers stop abusing, to repent of their attitudes and behavior, to make restitution in every way possible, and to embrace the qualities of agape love to heal their own hearts and to love others (*compare Eph. 3:20*).

**Try to put yourself in the place of someone traumatized by violence. What words of acceptance, comfort, and hope would you like to hear? Why is it important to provide safety and caring acceptance rather than offering advice about how to live better with the abuser?**

total forgiveness takes place when we sincerely petition to the Father to let those who have hurt us off the hook—even if they have hurt not only us, but also those close to us.”—*Total Forgiveness* (Lake Mary, FL: Charisma House, 2002), p. 4.

Kendall also believes that total forgiveness does not mean closing our eyes to those who will continue to harm others. “Just as God forgives people without approving of their sin, we also must learn that forgiving people does not imply an endorsement of their evil deeds.”—Page 12.

“Totally forgiving someone doesn’t necessarily mean we will

## Inductive Bible Study

**Texts for Discovery:** *Mark 7:6-13, Romans 5:6-11, Ephesians 4:1-3, Colossians 3:12-15, 1 John 1:9*

**1** The world is a cruel place where many live by the dictum “Survival of the fittest.” Christian homes should be *sanctuaries*, in the truest sense of the word, where spouses and parents, children and siblings, can find shelter from emotional and physical abuse. Yet, some Christian homes remain far from God’s ideal. List three reasons why God’s ideal for Christian families remains so elusive. List three strategies to help us get closer to God’s ideal.

**2** In Colossians 3:12-15, Paul outlined the process by which God’s people can live out kingdom principles in their families and congregations. Notice the graces with which Christians are to clothe themselves (compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness, and patience) and provide real-life examples of each as they would be lived out in the life of a typical Christian family.

**3** Nearly every week news reports tell of some horrific examples of physical, emotional, or sexual abuse perpetrated by family members against one another. Fairly often religion is mentioned as a contributing factor in the situation. What Bible truths should be emphasized to counteract these terrible distortions?

**4** Forgiveness will not undo the damage done by a thoughtless or deliberate act of cruelty against some member of the family. Jesus forgave the people who put Him on the cross—while they were in the act of doing it. Is that level of forgiveness possible in our family relationships? If so, how is it realized?

**5** Honesty is vital to peace and healing in a Christian family. What practical methods do you use to make sure family problems are dealt with in a positive, frank, and Christlike way?

## Twisting the Word

**With** which of these statements do you agree or disagree? Why?

- ❶ People who are abused should turn the other cheek.
- ❷ Wives should be submissive, regardless of what their husbands do to them.
- ❸ Violent behavior by a spouse or a parent is just a cross some people have to bear.
- ❹ The pain we encounter in life is ultimately for our good.

Victims of violence in Christian families need support to find safety for themselves and their children and to meet other practical and emotional needs. Times of domestic violence are times of great spiritual crisis. Where was God when I was being abused? Is God punishing me for something I have done or trying to teach me a lesson? Sometimes their deep-seated beliefs or the counsel they receive will have a tendency to prolong, rather than relieve, their situation.

No Christian principle supports or condones abuse. Those who seek biblical texts to defend their behavior are guilty not only of abuse but of perverting the Word of God. Christ championed the cause of the oppressed. It is His Spirit to love and accept, to affirm and build others up rather than to abuse or tear others down. His followers are called to rectify those religious and cultural beliefs that some may twist and pervert in order to justify or cover up family violence.

**The** New Testament has examples of people twisting doctrines in order to justify their own ways. See, for example, Matthew 12:1-14, Mark 7:6-13. Which Bible texts might some people pervert in an attempt to justify their abuse?

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Victims need people who are sensitive and careful about offering hasty solutions or moralizing. Abused persons need help accessing the specialized help they need. While those seeking to help them encourage victims in getting professional care if possible, they also minister to them graciously and compassionately, providing them with stability in a time of unrest.



want to spend our vacation with them, but it does mean that we release the bitterness in our hearts concerning what they have done.”—Page 8. Punishment belongs to God alone.

Kendall continues, “Relinquishing bitterness is an open invitation for the Holy Spirit to give you His peace, His joy and the knowledge of His will.”—Page 30. Finally, 1 John 4:18 teaches us

## Witnessing

Healing does not always come about, nor is peace always restored, by sidestepping issues of conflict and wrongdoing. God knew that Adam’s and Eve’s restoration could not be accomplished by leaving them in the Garden of Eden and excusing their transgression on the grounds that they had underestimated the seriousness of deviating from His instruction. “After all,” He might have said, “eating a piece of forbidden fruit is a relatively small matter. They meant no harm; they were just seeking for expanded consciousness and momentarily forgot their dependence on Me.” Such permissiveness would have been fatal to the destiny of our world, for all sin, from that time forward, would have been rationalized as an experiment in alternative approaches to the Creator’s instruction.

God’s penalties were corrective and designed to deliver Adam and Eve through the plan of redemption (and all their descendants) from ultimate ruin. This plan would involve infinite sacrifice for God and definite discipline and obedience on the part of believing humanity.

In the context of this understanding, how should the church deal with members who

- (a) chronically gossip and criticize?
- (b) embezzle money from the church?
- (c) assail the doctrines of the church and demand an open hearing in Sabbath School and during worship service?
- (d) commit adultery and insist that “the church has no business poking into a person’s private life”?
- (e) sexually seduce young Sabbath School students?
- (f) solicit money from members for their own independent *ministry* without approval from the church board?

Plainly, no single short answer is the *one size that fits all*. But does the church have a duty to forgive so unconditionally offenders and dividers that it never takes disciplinary or corrective measures, in order to avoid seeming judgmental and unchristlike? How does an atmosphere of permissiveness affect the witness and image of a church? How can discipline be restoratively applied in a manner consistent with the love Christ displayed on the cross?

## The Gift of Forgiveness

At the heart of Christianity is an incredibly wonderful concept—*forgiveness*. It is God’s gift to families when hearts and relationships have been wounded.

**What** do the following texts tell us about forgiveness? *Matt. 18:27, Luke 23:34, Rom. 5:6-11, Eph. 1:7.*

Through the Cross of Christ, forgiveness is offered, even before the offenders ask for it (*Luke 23:34; compare Acts 5:31, 13:38, 26:18*). By His grace God made a fountain that has washed us and invites us to come, repent, and be clean (*compare Rom. 2:4*). Humanly, forgiveness is a decision to let go of the destructive malice of revenge. We remind our wounded hearts that Christ has suffered for all sin, ours against God and that of others against us. We then pass forgiveness on. The hurt one is now freed within, whether or not the offender asks for forgiveness. It does not, however, free the wrongdoer from responsibility, from the need to repent, or from all the consequences of the abusive behavior.

**What** do these texts tell us about forgiveness? *2 Chron. 7:14, Matt. 18:32-35, 1 John 1:9.*

Notice the conditional “if” in these texts. If forgiveness is ultimately to be effective, there must be repentance on the part of the wrongdoer. Recognizable earmarks of true repentance include: stopping the offending behavior, giving a sincere apology, taking responsibility for the behavior and damage done, showing care for the pain of the wronged one, making restitution in every way possible, and making changes to protect against reoccurrence.

Reconciliation is not the same as forgiveness. For reconciliation to occur, both must want it and be willing to try to rebuild trust again. Over time, through open communication and consideration of each one’s needs and feelings, destructive relational patterns can change. Patterns of conflict resolution that meet the needs of both can be cultivated.

**In what way does the assurance that we have been forgiven by God in Christ give us courage to offer forgiveness to a wrongdoer or to make a much-needed apology?**

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that “there is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment.”

## Life-Application Approach

**Icebreaker:** “In the Bible the word for *peace, shalom*, never means simply the absence of trouble. It means everything which makes for our highest good. The peace which the world offers us is the peace of escape, the peace which comes from the avoidance of trouble and from refusing to face things. The peace which Jesus offers us is the peace of conquest. No experience of life can ever take it from us and no sorrow, no danger, no suffering can ever make it less. It is independent of outward circumstances”—Barclay, “The Gospel of John,” *The Daily Study Bible*, rev. ed., vol. 2, p. 171.

### Thought Questions:

❶ The lesson says that the home is the single most violent place in society. It is easy to assume that families from such homes are not in your church. Unfortunately, violence in the family is a well-hidden phenomenon. Smiling, happy families, sitting together in church every Sabbath, are not proof of peace in the home. Shame, denial, and fear keep the abused from seeking help. Not many churches have a trained counselor on staff. What can your church do to provide confidential counseling services to your members?

❷ “There can be no peace-making in the wrong atmosphere. If men have come together to hate, they will hate. If men have come together to refuse to understand, they will misunderstand. If men have come together to see no other point of view but their own, they will see no other. But if men have come together, loving Christ and seeking to love each other, even those who are most widely separated can come together in him.”—Barclay, “The Gospel of Mark,” *The Daily Study Bible*, revised edition, pp. 140, 141.

### Application Question:

Reread the icebreaker. Imagine the pain of being nailed alive to a cross. Translate that into the depth of involvement that the church needs to have concerning the burdens and problems of others. Identify people in your congregation with the gifts of empathy, counseling, listening, and servitude. Ask them to be the burden-bearers of the church and come up with specific strategies to be there for people who are suffering.

**Further Study:** Ellen G. White, *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 304–306; “The Measure of Forgiveness,” *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 243–251; *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 142; *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 100.

*Justifiable indignation.* “It is true there is an indignation that is justifiable, even in the followers of Christ. When they see that God is dishonored, and His service brought into disrepute, when they see the innocent oppressed, a righteous indignation stirs the soul. Such anger, born of sensitive morals, is not a sin. But those who at any supposed provocation feel at liberty to indulge anger or resentment are opening the heart to Satan. Bitterness and animosity must be banished from the soul if we would be in harmony with heaven.”—Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 310.

### Discussion Questions:

- ❶ What are some of the cultural attitudes that exist in your own society that help create an environment in which family abuse is tolerated? What can you as a class do to help church members be on guard against assimilating these attitudes?
- ❷ For those who are willing (and only to an appropriate degree), talk about how their own family works through conflicts. What have they learned from their own experiences that could help others facing similar challenges?
- ❸ Discuss the difference between forgiveness and what sometimes is mistaken for forgiveness—tolerance, excusing the wrongdoer, absorbing the blame, or rationalizing the hurtful behavior. Why is it so important to know the difference?

**Summary:** Some conflict can be expected in close relationships. Often, through prayerful use of scriptures that teach about relationships, these can be reduced and managed by Christians.