



# WHY YOUR FAMILY MATTERS MORE THAN YOU THINK

2019 is the centenary of family ministries in the Seventh-day Adventist Church.

DAVID LOOKED OUT THE WINDOW and blinked away his tears. “I’ve listened to my old ministerial colleagues. I’ve seen the pain our wives went through. I know why our children don’t come to church. We thought we were doing the right thing when we made ministry our priority, but we made a serious mistake. We neglected our important responsibility to our families.”

His fingers ruffled through the worn pages of his Bible. “Paul says when you choose a leader, ‘he must manage his own family well and see that his children obey him, and he must do so in a manner worthy of full respect. If anyone does not know how to manage his own family, how can he take care of God’s church?’” (1 Timothy 3:4, 5, NIV).

“If I could live my life over again I would make sure my wife and children felt loved, happy, and supported,” David says. “I can see the pain I caused by my upside-down priorities. My wife left after 20 years. I rarely see my children and grandchildren. If I’d been

a better husband and father, I would have been a better pastor to my churches, and we might still be a family.”

He sighed. “Ellen White reminded us not to neglect our families. She said, ‘He who is engaged in the work of the gospel ministry must be faithful in his family life. . . . He who fails to be a faithful, discerning shepherd in the home will surely fail of being a faithful shepherd of the flock of God in the church’” (*Pastoral Ministry*, pp. 88, 89).

## **GOD FIRST . . .**

Our relationship with God is our number-one priority. “We love because He first loved us” (1 John 4:19). The more we immerse ourselves in God’s love and grow our relationship with Him, the more He will inspire

and empower us to have healthy relationships with our families. Taking time to pray and experience God's love for you and others through His Word is foundational to all healthy relationships.

### . . . THEN HEALTHY FAMILIES

God created humans to live together in marriages, families, and spiritual communities so they would learn how to be patient, kind, generous, and forgiving, and grow closer to His concept of unselfish love. When a pastor is intentional about nurturing loving relationships and is actively learning how to be the best spouse, parent, or friend, he or she will also be developing vital pastoral care skills. When pastors' marriages are healthy, the pastors are better able to help troubled couples. But when the pastor's family is unhappy, it is much harder to minister to struggling families. Pastors whose families are hurting are less likely to preach about the importance of healthy relationships and to organize seminars to support and enrich families. Without guidance and support, members may struggle to manage the challenges of family life, leading to broken relationships and a cycle of pain that spirals to the next generation.

Current research suggests that troubled family relationships, conflicts within the church, and a sense of not feeling cared for by the church community are the main causes of people leaving our church. Ellen White shares this insight into the important role of family relationships in creating loving churches: "The angels of God . . . will help you to make your family a model of the heavenly family. Let there be peace in the home, and there will be peace in the church. This precious experience brought into the church will be the means of creating a kindly affection one for another" (*Child Guidance*, p. 549).



### SETTING AN EXAMPLE

It's easy to put family relationships at the bottom of our to-do list. We try to reassure ourselves that everyone will be OK because we're doing God's work and He'll take care of our family. But we have an important responsibility. "Let not the heart of one connected with you starve for the want of kindness and sympathy," wrote Ellen White (*The Adventist Home*, p. 107). If aloneness wasn't good in a perfect world (Genesis 2:18), then it's much more painful in our world today. Loneliness, even in marriages, families, and churches, is a cause of physical, emotional, and spiritual pain that can be as bad for a person's health as smoking 15 cigarettes a day.

When the pastor's family creates wise and loving boundaries around itself, it sets a positive example for other families. Organize church meetings so families can spend quality time together. Run marriage and parenting seminars during Pathfinders and other children's events to reduce the need for babysitters. Avoid meetings on Sundays and use video-conferencing to minimize time away from home.

"When I heard about the value of prioritizing my family's needs I was sceptical," said James. "So, I tried an experiment. I spent one-on-one time with each of my two kids and my wife every day for a couple of weeks. I thought it would be time-consuming and add to my stress. But it didn't. I was happier; they were happier; we had fewer arguments and better worship times. I felt more energized after I had focused on their needs for a while, and I returned to my ministry stronger and refreshed."

### TIPS FOR STRENGTHENING YOUR FAMILY

- Spend time with God, focusing on His love for you and your family. Ask Him to show you and your spouse His vision for your family.
- Talk with your family about your family strengths, as well as the areas where you could do more growing. Listen to everyone's ideas and work to implement them.

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- Be intentional about learning how to have a strong, Christ-centered marriage and how to parent your children with love. Be there for your family at the important events in their lives and at times of stress, sadness, and illness.
- Aim for several warm connections with each person in your family every day. Make a list of the ways you could connect with each person. Plan regular dates with your spouse and children. It doesn't cost anything to take a picnic lunch and walk in a beautiful place, but it can refresh your relationships.
- Do chores together and make them fun, so everyone feels connected and supported. Offer to help each other for 10-15 minutes a day.
- Family mealtimes are a good way to connect with each other, share your faith journeys, and talk about important values. Download and print colorful placemats with family worship suggestions (go to [www.ted.adventist.org/family-ministries/resources](http://www.ted.adventist.org/family-ministries/resources), and scroll down the page). Have four or five meals together as a family each week. Or use video calls to join them at the table.
- Ask yourself, "Does my wife/husband/child/parent/friend/family member feel less alone or more alone in our relationship than they did last year? What can I do to reduce their sense of aloneness? How can I be a channel of God's amazing love into their life?" **J**

*Karen Holford is director of Family Ministries for the Trans-European Division.*

## Resources to Enrich Your Family

**Toucan Together**—This app is a free marriage seminar in your pocket! Explore bite-sized quizzes and videos and then share your ideas with each other.

**Couple Checkup**—Take a Couple Checkup online to assess your relationship and get great ideas for making it even better! Go to [www.couplecheckup.com](http://www.couplecheckup.com).

**Spiritual Parent Coaching**—This app, created by Pastor Daron Pratt, a family and children's ministries leader in Australia, is designed to help you grow your child's faith and strengthen your whole family. It's filled with ideas for parents, couples, and churches.

Igniter Media has created a short and powerful video to highlight the importance of church leaders caring for their family relationships. You can find it at [www.ignitermedia.com/products/7320-change-the-world](http://www.ignitermedia.com/products/7320-change-the-world).

The North American Division has produced some excellent materials to support pastoral families through their different life experiences and challenges. You can find these at the following websites:

- <http://www.nadministerial.com/2q15>
- <http://www.nadministerial.com/videos-2/>
- <http://www.nadministerial.com/spouses-resources/>