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Introduction

Family Ministries is a ministry of grace which acknowledges as normative the biblical teachings relating to the family and holds high God's ideals for family living. At the same time, it brings an understanding of the brokenness experienced by individuals and families in a fallen world. Thus Family Ministries seeks to enable families to stretch toward divine ideals, while at the same time extending the good news of God's saving grace and the promise of growth possible through the indwelling Spirit. (Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual, Revised 1995).

This course on biblical foundations will look at several aspects of the relationship between the Bible and our work for families:

- How to make the most of the Bible as our textbook and discover the ways truth for family living has been revealed in Scripture.
- An introduction to a biblical theology of the family.
- A consideration of several major motifs in Scripture which serve as pillars for ministry to families.

The Bible as a Textbook on Family Relationships

Family ministries helps the church to take a fresh look at scripture, to put on what we might call “family glasses” and to see in the word of God its profound teach-

ings about family relationships. This new look will not restrict or impair our theological vision; it will cast a relational hue over familiar passages upon which we may not have focused in such a special way.

Relational directives

Scripture presents its view of human relationships in a variety of ways. The first example of Scripture teaching on family can be found in what are called *relational directives*. Relational directives are commands intended to create a basic framework for living in relationship with fellow human beings. These are scattered throughout Scripture and can be grouped into several categories. Some are very generic and apply broadly to all relationships, others are more specifically directed toward people in particular relationships—married couples, parents, children, neighbors, friends. A good example of a *generic* relational directive is the golden rule: “*So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.*” (Matthew 7:12).

Other examples include the following:

“*Love your neighbor as yourself.*” (Matthew 22:40).

“*Love your enemies.*” (Luke 6:27).

“*In humility consider others better than yourselves.*” (Philippians 2:3).

“*Live at peace with everyone.*” (Romans 12:18).

“*Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.*” (Ephesians 5:21).

There are specific relational directives for families. Consider these references to marriage:

“*Rejoice in the wife of your youth.*” (Proverbs 5:18).

“*Wives, submit to your husband as to the Lord. . . .Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her. . . .*” (Ephesians 5:22-25).

“*Husbands. . .be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life. . . .*” (1 Peter 3:7).

Several directives address parents, for example:

“*These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your heart. Impress them on your children. Talk about them. . . .*” (Deuteronomy 6:6, 7).

“*Fathers, do not exasperate your children, instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.*” (Ephesians 6:4).

Children also receive directives:

“*Listen, my sons, to a father’s instruction; pay attention and gain understanding.*” (Proverbs 4:1).

“*Children, obey your parents in everything, for this pleases the Lord.*” (Colossians 3:20).

At least three of the decalogue directives, the ten commandments, are specifically intended to protect, preserve and enhance life in the family:

“Honor your father and your mother. . .” (Exodus 20:12).

“You shall not commit adultery.” (Exodus 20:14).

“You shall not covet your neighbor’s wife.” (Deuteronomy 5:21).

All of the biblical directives regarding our relationships presuppose that the good news of God’s love and grace has been received in our hearts. God’s directives are set within the context of life in the redeemed community of His people. They are intended to be a response to the salvation He has provided. (Exodus 20:2). “If you love me, you will obey what I command.” (John 14:15).

Relational laws and probabilities

A very different category of scriptural instruction about relationships, including relationships in the family, is found in the Bible’s presentation of *relational laws* and *probabilities*. The book of Proverbs is the greatest collection of this material. Here are unfolded universal psychological principles, insights into the laws implanted within human beings by the Creator which govern emotional and social responses. Ellen G. White has noted that all parts of the human organism including “the senses, the faculties of the mind. . .were placed under law.” (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 415). Here are a few samples of this kind of scriptural material:

- *“An anxious heart weighs a man down, but a kind word cheers him up.” (Proverbs 12:25).*
- *“A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.” (Proverbs 15:1).*
- *“Gossip separates close friends.” (Proverbs 16:28).*
- *“Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it.” (Proverbs 22:6).*

Many of these statements are not so much promises or guaranteed responses as they are *probabilities*. It’s as if we’re being told, “Given the complexity of the human mind and emotions, this is what is likely to occur when such-and-such happens.” To understand and apply the insights we can gain from these relational laws and probabilities is to discover the divinely revealed keys to improved relationships in our families.

Narratives

The *narratives* or stories of scripture are one of the primary ways truth about family relationships is conveyed. Stories and parables are universally appreciated as a means of conveying lessons to people of all ages. The actual historical stories of individuals and families are intended to instruct and inspire us (Romans 15:4), to rebuke, correct and train us in right living (II Timothy 3:16). We find ourselves in these stories and parables; we take comfort that our life experience is not unique.