

REACHING FAMILIES FOR JESUS

GROWING DISCIPLES

— WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER —

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Table of Contents

- V • Preface
- VI • 100 Years of Family Ministries Around the World
- VIII • How to Use this Planbook

Sermons

- 10 • Rock or Sand Builders?
- 16 • A Disciple-making Parent
- 23 • Be Gentle with the Young Man
- 30 • Parents as Role Models for their Children

Children's Stories

- 37 • Bullying Is not Right
- 39 • Grandparents' Celebration Day
- 41 • I know I am Somebody

Seminars

- 44 • Building Your Marriage on the Rock
- 50 • Growing Characters for Eternity
- 61 • Parents Can Help Teens and Young Adults Say "No" to Drugs
- 68 • A Forever Friendship

Leadership Resources

- 76 • Growing Disciples Through Transformational Learning
- 80 • Family Leadership Through Submission
- 86 • The Elijah Message
- 89 • By His Side

Reprinted Articles

- 93 ● Wedding Wisdom
- 95 ● Fatherless Child
- 97 ● Marriage Material

Book Shelf

- 100 ● Marriage: Biblical and Theological Aspects, Vol. 1
- 101 ● Family Faith, A Devotional on Family Dynamics
- 102 ● 52 Ways to Parent Happy Children

Appendix A - Family Ministries Implementation

- 104 ● A Family Ministries Policy and Purpose Statement
- 106 ● The Family Ministries Leader
- 107 ● What is a Family?
- 108 ● Committee and Planning Guidelines
- 110 ● A Good Presentation Will Do Four Things
- 111 ● The Ten Commandments of Presentations
- 112 ● Family Life Profile Survey
- 114 ● Family Life Profile
- 115 ● Family Ministries Interest Survey
- 116 ● Community Family Life Education Survey
- 117 ● Sample Evaluation

Appendix B - Voted Statements

- 119 ● Affirmation of Marriage
- 120 ● Statement on Home and Family

Preface

The message is clear, pointed, distinct, and unequivocal, as Moses shares God's commands with the children of Israel saying:

HEAR, O ISRAEL: THE LORD OUR GOD, THE LORD IS ONE. YOU SHALL LOVE THE LORD YOUR GOD WITH ALL YOUR HEART AND WITH ALL YOUR SOUL AND WITH ALL YOUR MIGHT. AND THESE WORDS THAT I COMMAND YOU TODAY SHALL BE ON YOUR HEART. YOU SHALL TEACH THEM DILIGENTLY TO YOUR CHILDREN, AND SHALL TALK OF THEM WHEN YOU SIT IN YOUR HOUSE, AND WHEN YOU WALK BY THE WAY, AND WHEN YOU LIE DOWN, AND WHEN YOU RISE. YOU SHALL BIND THEM AS A SIGN ON YOUR HAND, AND THEY SHALL BE AS FRONTLETS BETWEEN YOUR EYES. YOU SHALL WRITE THEM ON THE DOORPOSTS OF YOUR HOUSE AND ON YOUR GATES. DEUTERONOMY 6:4-9 (ESV)

This passage of scripture—the *Shemá*—known as such since Old Testament times, was the prayer every observant Hebrew knew by memory and recited twice a day—evening and morning—as a part of their daily *family worship*. It was considered the essence of the Torah.

Growing Disciples is the Family Ministries theme for this year. This comprehensive notion must become one of the central activities promoted and advocated by our corporate church, and by every local congregation and family within our ranks. After all, Christian existence is dynamic,

and must be progressing every day to a closer and more meaningful relationship with Jesus. To be sure, this will not transpire unless those of us in leadership are also growing in the love and grace of Jesus every day. To speak about *Growing Disciples* without a compelling awareness of our daily personal need of Jesus is like walking through the desert without access to potable water to quench our inevitable thirst.

It is our hope that family worship will become the place where each family and single adult will make the time to connect with God in a profound and consequential way, by engaging in daily Bible study, prayer, meditation and becoming an active member of the family of God. After all, for the church to experience *Growing Disciples*, the membership must be intentional about seriously looking for God while He can still be found (Isaiah 55:6).

We hope this will be your practice during this year and for the remainder of your life, and by reaching up to God each day, experience the peace that only growing disciples have.

For stronger and healthier families,

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100 Years of Family Ministries Around the World

On October 8, 1919 the General Conference Committee created the Home Commission, which became operative in 1922 with Arthur W. Spalding as director, who worked in this capacity with his wife Maud, until 1941. Spalding created literature for the education of the entire family. A series of leaflets were produced dealing with different phases of home life entitled, The Christian Home Series. Arthur W. Spalding wrote the lessons and Maud Spalding graded them.

Five books of the Christian Home Series came from the pens of Arthur Spalding and Dr. Belle Wood-Comstock, which provided instruction for family living.

Christian Home Day was set for the first Sabbath in February and is still preserved on the church calendar as Christian Home and Marriage Week, from the second Sabbath to the third Sabbath of February.

In June of 1941, a General Conference Convention on the home was held, perhaps the first Family Life International.

The Home Commission became part of the Department of Education in 1941. During the next three decades marriage and family life programs were promoted by Parent and Home Education Secretaries:

Florence Rebok (1941-1947), Arabella Moore Williams (1947-1954), Archa O. Dart (1954-1970) and W. John Cannon (1970-1975).

At the General Conference Session held in Vienna, Austria in 1975, to address the need for stronger, more stable Adventist homes, the Home and Family Service (HFS) was organized. A husband and wife team, Delmer and Betty Holbrook, were elected as directors. The Holbrooks organized and conducted training seminars for administrators, pastors and laity in every world division.

Karen and Ronald Flowers joined the HFS staff in 1980. D. W. Holbrook directed HFS from 1975 to 1982, and Betty Holbrook served as director from 1982 until 1985 when Home and Family Service became part of the Department of Church Ministries (CM).

Family Ministries continued as a strong section of the Department of Church Ministries through the efforts of Betty Holbrook, an Associate Director of CM until her retirement in 1988, and Karen and Ronald Flowers, Associate Directors of CM until 1995. D.W. Holbrook, Director of CM from 1985-1987 also assisted with Family Ministries.

At the 1995 General Conference Session held in Utrecht, in the Netherlands, the

Department of Church Ministries was disbanded, with several separate departments being formed, including the current Department of Family Ministries, with Ronald Flowers as Director, and Karen Flowers as Associate Director, until their retirement in June 2010, at the General Conference Session held in Atlanta, Georgia. During this time, an infrastructure of Family Ministries Directors were elected at Division, Union and Conference/Mission levels; and the Family Ministries leadership training curriculum was put in place, as well as the publication of annual Family Ministries Planbooks.

At the General Conference Session held in Atlanta, Georgia, Willie and Elaine Oliver were elected on June 28, 2010 as Director and Associate Director, respectively, of the Department of Family Ministries. The Olivers came to the Department from a long career in Family Ministries, having directed the Department of Family Ministries of the North American Division (NAD) since its inception at the NAD Year-end Meeting in 1995; and Willie Oliver serving as Director of the Department

of Family Ministries for the Atlantic Union Conference (1994-1995), and the Greater New York Conference (1989-1993).

During their first quinquennium as Directors of Family Ministries, Willie and Elaine Oliver prioritized the training of all Division and Union Directors of Family Ministries in the PREPARE/ENRICH modality of premarital and marriage enrichment counseling; developed Real Family Talk with Willie and Elaine Oliver, a television program seen on the Hope Channel around the world; continued the annual publication of Family Ministries Planbooks; advanced the Family to Family evangelism process as a part of the Mission to the Families in the Cities—Mission to the Cities—initiative of the General Conference; and became authors of the Real Family Talk column on Adventist World online.

Willie and Elaine Oliver were elected to a second term as Directors of the Department of Family Ministries on July 6, 2015, at the 60th Session of the General Conference held in San Antonio, Texas.



How to Use This Planbook

The Family Ministries Planbook is an annual resource organized by the General Conference Family Ministries department with input from the world field to supply local churches around the world with resources for the special family emphases weeks and Sabbaths.

VIII

Christian Home and Marriage Week: February 11-18

Christian Home and Marriage Week occurs in February embracing two Sabbaths: Christian Marriage Day that emphasizes Christian marriage and Christian Home Day that emphasizes parenting. Christian Home and Marriage Week begins on the second Sabbath and ends on the third Sabbath in February.

Christian Marriage Day: Sabbath, February 11, (Emphasizes Marriage)

Use the Marriage Sermon for worship service and the Marriage Seminar during a Friday evening, Sabbath afternoon or Saturday night program.

Christian Home Day: Sabbath, February 18, (Emphasizes Parenting)

Use the Parenting Sermon for worship service and the Parenting Seminar during a Friday evening, Sabbath afternoon or Saturday night program.

Family Togetherness Week: September 3-9

Family Togetherness Week is scheduled in the first week in September, beginning with the first Sunday and ending on the following Sabbath with Family Togetherness Day. Family Togetherness Week and Family Togetherness Day highlight celebrating the church as a family.

Family Togetherness Day: Sabbath, September 9 (Emphasizes the Church Family)

Use the Family Sermon for the worship service and the Family Seminar for a Friday evening, Sabbath afternoon and/or Saturday night program.

Within this planbook you will find sermons, seminars, children's stories as well as leadership resources, reprint articles and book reviews to help facilitate these special days and other programs you may want to implement during the year. In Appendix A you will find useful information that will assist you in implementing family ministries in your local church.

This resource also includes Microsoft PowerPoint® presentations of the seminars and handouts. Seminar facilitators are encouraged to personalize the Microsoft PowerPoint® presentations with their own personal stories and pictures that reflect the diversity of their various communities. To download them please visit: <http://family.adventist.org/planbook2017>

SERMONS

Rock or Sand Builders?

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

The Texts

MATTHEW 7:24-27;

I CORINTHIANS 13:1-8;

EPHESIANS 5:25

Introduction

10

On a recent trip to Cotê d'Ivoire (Ivory Coast), for leadership meetings with the Family Ministries Directors of the West-Central Africa Division, our flight from Paris to Abidjan was delayed by a couple of hours. Already scheduled to arrive an hour before midnight, the delay meant the Division driver picking us up from the airport would be having a very long night and early morning, a matter completely out of our control.

To add insult to injury, instead of making up time—which often happens with many delayed flights—our layover in Ougadougou, the capital city of Burkina Faso, became a disaster. A passenger that boarded in Paris, headed to Abidjan, could not be found, causing anxiety among the crew, and further postponing our arrival in Abidjan. This new reality made us somewhat apprehensive, wondering if our

driver, who we had never met, would still be at the airport when we arrived in the wee hours of the morning.

Our story has a happy ending. We are convinced it had to do with something that happened many years before. Someone obviously poured great values into Charles, our driver. Integrity, honor, and an amazing work ethic, were all on display that day.

Charles was at the airport to meet us, as though it was the middle of the afternoon. A man with a very kind and pleasant disposition, he drove us safely to our lodging place at three o'clock in the morning. There is no doubt in our minds Charles' character was built on the solid Rock.

Our sermon today is titled *Rock or Sand Builders?* Let us pray.

Obedience vs. Disobedience In Everyday Life

In Matthew 7:24-27 we find the following notable words of Jesus uttered as part of what is known in Biblical literature as the Sermon on the Mount:

THESE WORDS I SPEAK TO YOU ARE NOT
INCIDENTAL ADDITIONS TO YOUR
LIFE, HOMEOWNER IMPROVEMENTS TO YOUR

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STANDARD OF LIVING. THEY ARE FOUNDATIONAL WORDS, WORDS TO BUILD A LIFE ON. IF YOU WORK THESE WORDS INTO YOUR LIFE, YOU ARE LIKE A SMART CARPENTER WHO BUILT HIS HOUSE ON SOLID ROCK. RAIN POURED DOWN, THE RIVER FLOODED, A TORNADO HIT—BUT NOTHING MOVED THAT HOUSE. IT WAS FIXED TO THE ROCK. BUT IF YOU USE MY WORDS IN BIBLE STUDIES AND DON'T WORK THEM INTO YOUR LIFE, YOU ARE LIKE A STUPID CARPENTER WHO BUILT HIS HOUSE ON THE SANDY BEACH. WHEN A STORM ROLLED IN AND THE WAVES CAME UP, IT COLLAPSED LIKE A HOUSE OF CARDS.
MATTHEW 7:24-27 (MSG)

On the banks of the Sea of Galilee, probably very close to Capernaum, the village where Jesus lived (Matthew 4:13) during His years of ministry; also the place where Peter, Andrew, Matthew, James, and John made their home; Jesus was ending what was perhaps the most prolific discourse He had given about the ethics of the Kingdom of God and the expectations for those who would be followers of His.

The Sermon on the Mount is the frequently used title given to the teachings of Jesus recorded in Matthew chapters 5–7. Whether the name can be accurately employed for the fairly comparable portion in Luke 6:20–49 depends upon one's understanding of the literary relationship between the two. Luke's version is habitually called the Sermon on the Plain because it is believed to have been delivered on 'a level place' (Luke 6:17) rather than 'on the mountain' (Matthew 5:1). Nevertheless, both expressions probably represent the same place considered from two different perspectives.

In the past it was commonly believed that the Sermon on the Mount was a single homily delivered by Jesus at a particular time. This unquestionably appears to be the case as it is recounted in Matthew. Jesus and His disciples sat down (v. 1), Jesus opened his mouth and taught them (v. 2), and at the conclusion of it all the crowds were astonished at his teaching (7:28). However, many scholars are of the opinion that the Sermon is really a compilation

of sayings of the Lord—'a kind of epitome of all the sermons that Jesus ever preached' (W. Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew*, 1, p. 79). They argue there is too much intense material here for one sermon. That the comprehensive array of issues is too much for a single presentation. They also believe certain segments of the sermon appear unexpectedly. That Luke's narrative seems more coherent and better contextualized as responses to questions raised by the disciples and others. Some scholars suggest that this makes it more likely that Matthew transferred sayings of Jesus into the single Sermon, than the fact that Luke found them there and distributed them throughout his Gospel. Others propose it is distinctive of Matthew to bring together teachings under certain captions and place them into the narrative of Jesus' life (cf. B. W. Bacon, *Studies in Matthew*, 1930, pp. 269–325), suggesting that the Sermon on the Mount is consequently merely the first of these informative sections.

These reflections, to be sure, do not oblige one to consider the complete Sermon as an illogical masterpiece. The historical context of Matthew 4:23–5:1 directs us to anticipate a notable dissertation presented at a specific time. In the Sermon are several structures that seem to be sermonettes of Jesus and not simply interesting anthologies of isolated maxims. When compared with Luke's Sermon, there are many parallel details. They both begin with blessings, close with the parable of the wise and foolish builders, and the interposing Lucan content about loving one's enemies in 6:27–36, and judging 6:37–42, develops in the same progression in Matthew, proposing that in the wake of both versions there was a shared informant. Prior to the writings of either Matthew or Luke, it is fair to believe that there was an original structure which matched an actual sermon presented at a specific time. The truth is, uncertainties as to whether the Sermon as it appears in Matthew is closer to the original than the account given by Luke, or if Matthew stuck to a structure provided by an earlier source, are still issues of intellectual debate. To be sure, it is sufficient to presume that Matthew took an original sermon source and enlarged it in order to introduce important information for the followers of Jesus.¹

Referencing the portion of Scripture we just read from the Sermon on the Mount, Ellen White shares:

THE SAME DANGER STILL EXISTS. MANY TAKE IT FOR GRANTED THAT THEY ARE CHRISTIANS, SIMPLY BECAUSE THEY SUBSCRIBE TO CERTAIN THEOLOGICAL TENETS. BUT THEY HAVE NOT BROUGHT THE TRUTH INTO PRACTICAL LIFE. THEY HAVE NOT BELIEVED AND LOVED IT, THEREFORE THEY HAVE NOT RECEIVED THE POWER AND GRACE THAT COME THROUGH SANCTIFICATION OF THE TRUTH. MEN MAY PROFESS FAITH IN THE TRUTH; BUT IF IT DOES NOT MAKE THEM SINCERE, KIND, PATIENT, FOREBEARING, HEAVENLY-MINDED, IT IS A CURSE TO ITS POSSESSORS, AND THROUGH THEIR INFLUENCE IT IS A CURSE TO THE WORLD” (WHITE, *THE DESIRE OF AGES*, P. 309)²

Matthew Henry, a noted Biblical commentator, suggests that the gospel writer “shows, by a parable, that hearing these sayings of Christ will not make us happy, if we do not make conscience of doing them; but that if we hear them and do them, *we are blessed in our deed.*”³

Obedience vs. Disobedience In Marriage

The Christian life and married life are not much different when observed from a similar vantage point. Knowing what God expects and doing what God requires are two entirely different realities.

It is difficult to miss that in the heart of the Sermon on the Mount the sacredness of marriage looms large. Matthew 5:27,28 declares:

“YOU HAVE HEARD THAT IT WAS SAID TO THOSE OF OLD, ‘YOU SHALL NOT COMMIT ADULTERY.’ BUT I SAY TO YOU THAT WHOEVER LOOKS AT A WOMAN TO LUST FOR HER HAS ALREADY COMMITTED ADULTERY WITH HER IN HIS HEART.” THE

BIBLE WRITER FURTHER EXPLICATES THE INTENTION OF THE PASSAGE IN VERSE 32 BY AFFIRMING: “BUT I SAY TO YOU THAT WHOEVER DIVORCES HIS WIFE FOR ANY REASON EXCEPT SEXUAL IMMORALITY CAUSES HER TO COMMIT ADULTERY; AND WHOEVER MARRIES A WOMAN WHO IS DIVORCED COMMITS ADULTERY.”

Referencing the currency of every healthy marriage, the Apostle Paul declares under divine inspiration in 1 Corinthians 13:1-8:

THOUGH I SPEAK WITH THE TONGUES OF MEN AND OF ANGELS, BUT HAVE NOT LOVE, I HAVE BECOME SOUNDING BRASS OR A CLANGING CYMBAL. AND THOUGH I HAVE THE GIFT OF PROPHECY, AND UNDERSTAND ALL MYSTERIES AND ALL KNOWLEDGE, AND THOUGH I HAVE ALL FAITH, SO THAT I COULD REMOVE MOUNTAINS, BUT HAVE NOT LOVE, I AM NOTHING. AND THOUGH I BESTOW ALL MY GOODS TO FEED THE POOR, AND THOUGH I GIVE MY BODY TO BE BURNED, BUT HAVE NOT LOVE, IT PROFITS ME NOTHING. LOVE SUFFERS LONG AND IS KIND; LOVE DOES NOT ENVY; LOVE DOES NOT PARADE ITSELF, IS NOT PUFFED UP; DOES NOT BEHAVE RUDELY, DOES NOT SEEK ITS OWN, IS NOT PROVOKED, THINKS NO EVIL; DOES NOT REJOICE IN INIQUITY, BUT REJOICES IN THE TRUTH; BEARS ALL THINGS, BELIEVES ALL THINGS, HOPES ALL THINGS, ENDURES ALL THINGS. LOVE NEVER FAILS.

So many married Christians today have totally forgotten that marriage was established by God at the very beginning of human history as a divine institution of foremost importance, when He declared in Genesis 2:18, “It is not good that man should be alone; I will make him a helper comparable to him.” A few verses later (vs. 24), God declared: “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh.”

And lest anyone suggest that this is an Old Testament notion that no longer applies to us as New Testament Christians, we read a