

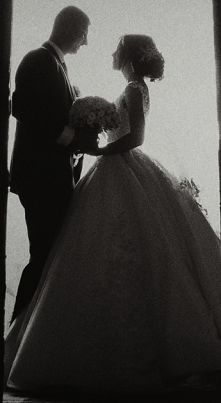
Ellen G. White Estate

MY JOURNEY TO LIFE

MARRIAGE

What is God's design for the Christian family?

STEP 14 OF 28



My Journey to Life, Step 14

Foreword

My Journey to Life will give you the keys for finding peace of mind, harmony of body, and success in relationships. Every step will transform your outlook on life as you unpack each lesson. We pray they will help you to fall in love with the greatest Teacher this world has ever known. So together, let's walk the pathway step-by-step to a new life in Jesus.

Preface

Marriage and a family can be one of life's greatest blessings. For many, sadly it isn't. Society and the media often depict marriage and raising children as necessary burdens that impose restraints upon a person's personal liberty and life goals. That was never in God's original plan. Let's discover God's original plan and how to recover the joy that many have lost.

Step Fourteen—Marriage and the Family

What is God's design for the Christian family? "Marriage was divinely established in Eden and affirmed by Jesus to be a lifelong union between a man and a woman in loving companionship. For the Christian a marriage commitment is to God as well as to the spouse, and should be entered into only between a man and a woman who share a common faith. Mutual love, honor, respect, and responsibility are the fabric of this relationship, which is to reflect the love, sanctity, closeness, and permanence of the relationship between Christ and His church. Regarding divorce, Jesus taught that the person who divorces a spouse, except for fornication, and marries another, commits adultery. Although some family relationships may fall short of the ideal, a man and a woman who fully commit themselves to each other in Christ through marriage may achieve loving unity through the guidance of the Spirit and the nurture of the church. God blesses the family and intends that its members shall assist each other toward complete maturity. Increasing family closeness is one of the earmarks of the final gospel message. Parents are to bring up their children to love and obey the Lord. By their example and their words, they are to teach them that Christ is a loving, tender, and caring guide who wants them to become members of His body, the family of God which embraces both single and married persons." —*Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, p. 333

Bible Discovery: Genesis 2:18-25; Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 6:5-9; Proverbs 22:6; Malachi 4:5, 6; Matthew 5:31, 32; 19:3-9, 12; Mark 10:11, 12; John 2:1-11; 1 Corinthians 7:7, 10, 11; 2 Corinthians 6:14; Ephesians 5:21-33; 6:1-4

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *Counsels for the Church*, pp. 130.6; 131.3

1. *Where did marriage originate?* Marriage, along with the Sabbath, were two of God’s best gifts given to humanity in Eden. God created Adam, then Eve, joining them in matrimony. Marriage is described in Genesis 2:24: “Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves [clings] to his wife, and they become one flesh.”

Marriage was intended by God to provide the joy of belonging, of intimacy, and companionship. It is the foundation of the family and of society itself. The same Hebrew word translated “cleave” is also used to describe soldering or sticking together.

God chooses the sacred bond of marriage to illustrate the closeness of the bond between Himself and His people. In Scripture the promise by which married couples are bound together is spoken of as a “covenant”—the term used for the most solemn and binding agreement known in God’s Word. The relationship between husband and wife is to be a pattern of God’s everlasting covenant of love with His people, the church. As God is faithful to His people, so the married man and woman are to center their covenant with each other on faithfulness and love (Psalm 89:24; Lamentations 3:23).

Bible Discovery: Genesis 1:16, 17; 2:18, 21-25; Deuteronomy 10:20; Isaiah 41:7; Jeremiah 3; Malachi 2:14; Matthew 19:5; Ephesians 5:21-23, 31

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 46.3

2. *What is the purpose of the home?* The home is a primary setting for the restoration of the image of God in men and women. Father, mother, and children are to express themselves with love and harmony, meeting each other’s needs for acceptance, belonging, and intimacy. Here the principles of real Christianity can be lived out, demonstrating to the world that God’s love in the heart results in happiness and joy.

Of course, for everything beautiful God has created, Satan produces a counterfeit. Thus, many families demonstrate the unconverted thoughts of a selfish heart, resulting in quarreling, rebelliousness, jealousy, anger, and even violence and sexual exploitation. Yet these outbursts of selfishness were alien to God’s original plan. Jesus said, “From the beginning it was not so” (Matthew 19:8).

Parents are to raise their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Even in homes where the peace of heaven does not reign supreme, God longs to restore peace and harmony through the new birth experience.

Bible Discovery: Genesis 1:27, 28; John 3:5, 6; Galatians 5:18-25; Ephesians 6:4; Colossians 3:10

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *Education*, p. 20.2; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 338.1

3. What does it mean to “walk together” (Amos 3:3)? One of the most important ways a couple can walk together is in worship of God. Scripture affirms that believers should not marry someone outside of their faith to a rift in their union. Having a similar religious experience helps to achieve the oneness that Scripture presents as God’s ideal for His children. Differences in spiritual values lead to lifestyle differences that can create deep tensions and rifts in marriage. Worse still, one partner can turn their spouse away from God and toward other gods, like power, materialism, secularism, hedonism, and immorality.

At the same time, each marriage partner must accept the responsibility for their own spiritual growth, and the choices they make. When one partner discovers that his or her spouse does not reflect God’s values in the relationship, he or she can keep loving with the unconditional agape love that comes from God.

Bible Discovery: Deuteronomy 7:4; Joshua 23:11-13; 2 Corinthians 5:10; 6:14-18

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 63.1; *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 362.3

4. What does it mean to be “one flesh?” The covenant vow that a man and woman make to each other in marriage culminates in sexual intimacy, which the Bible refers to as becoming one flesh. God’s purpose is that the married couple experience an intimate bond of mind and emotions that would be the foundation of sexual oneness, making married love filled with warmth, joy, and delight.

Contemporary culture often portrays sex in a crude, debased, dehumanizing and even brutal way. God intended married sexual relations to be honorable and undefiled. He never designed marriage to be full of lust, shameful, and sinful (Hebrews 13:4).

Married couples who cannot experience sexual intercourse because of physical limitations can nonetheless find joy and bonding in other expressions of physical affection. All married couples should continue to seek through God’s grace to love the other with the biblical *agape* love or unconditional, affectionate, and selfless love.

To be one flesh, two people must be completely loyal to each other and stand with their mates against anything that might mar their unity. To be one flesh requires an active, pursuing love that will not give up in the face of deep obstacles to marital harmony.

Bible Discovery: Proverbs 5:18, 19; Song of Solomon 1-8; 1 Corinthians 13:4-8

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 358.3; *The Adventist Home*, p. 121.2

5. What does God's ideal marriage look like? The Scripture is determinative: "Therefore a man leaves his father and his mother and cleaves to his wife" (Genesis 2:24). The bond and interdependence of the married couple supersedes all other earthly relationships. God intended for the couple to depend most deeply on the affirmation and reassurance that they receive from each other. Both should preserve the sanctity of the family circle, and not confide the faults of their spouse to any outside party. (*Exceptions to this principle apply to professional counselors, in circumstances of abuse, mental illness, and dysfunctions in a marriage or family.*)

God intends marriage to be a lifelong monogamous union, representing the faithfulness of God to His people. A couple's unity involves not only physical fusion but also emotional and spiritual union. Christian couples understand that in marrying, they have covenanted to be faithful to each other for as long as they both live.

Bible Discovery: Genesis 2:23; Isaiah 50:1; 54:5; Malachi 2:16; 2 Corinthians 6:14

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 177.1

6. How did Adam and Eve's fall affect marriage? Adam and Eve's act of disobedience in Eden distorted humanity's reflection of God's image, and negatively impacted every aspect of their lives. That distortion had its effect on marriage, both theirs and every marriage thereafter. Self-interest and self-justification prevailed where perfect love and unity once reigned.

Both Adam and Eve had enjoyed face to face communication with God; after their sin they fearfully hid from God, attempting to conceal the truth about themselves and engaging in accusations and rationalization about their sin. When couples today accuse one another while justifying their own behavior, they are partaking in Adam and Eve's rebellion and disobedience.

After sin, God told the woman, "Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you" (Gen. 3:16). Although God intended the submission of the wife to the husband (which did not change the basic equality of man and woman) to be a blessing in the post-Edenic world, it quickly distorted into dominance of men over women through abuse of power, manipulation, and destruction of individuality.

Today, Christian married couples seek to restore God's ideal of mutual submission as far as possible, to better reflect the image of the Godhead in marriage. The essence of Christianity is to live in the self-denying harmony that characterized marriage before the fall. Both husband and wife will seek to contribute to the other's happiness and joy, with neither losing his or her individuality.

Bible Discovery: Genesis 18:19; Romans 5:12; 1 Corinthians 13:4; Galatians 3:28; 5:22; Ephesians 5:21, 22

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, pp. 118.2, 215.1; *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 484.1

7. What are deviations from God's ideal for marriage?

- **Polygamy.** Many of the biblical family structures were distortions of God's original plan including polygamy, which has brought untold suffering, power struggles and alienation. The monogamous marriage represents most clearly the relationship between Christ and His church and between the individual and God.
- **Fornication and Adultery.** Though common in many cultures, Scripture regards any sexual relationship outside of marriage as sin.
- **Impurity of Thought.** Sensual media that promotes illicit sexual experiences such as viewing pornography in magazines, computer games, the internet, or watching movies that reduce men, women, and children to mere sexual objects perverts the mind and will destroy relationships with your married partner and with God. Reading sensual books, listening to dirty talks, off jokes, or explicit music that invokes impure thoughts, tarnishes the image of God in the listener.
- **Incest.** Incest was forbidden in the Old Testament (Leviticus 18:6-29; Deuteronomy 27:20-23) and condemned in the New (1 Corinthians 5:1-5). Having sexual relations of any kind with a family member other than one's spouse is an abomination to God.
- **Divorce.** Scripture recognizes adultery and fornication (Matt. 5:32) and abandonment by an unbelieving partner (1 Cor. 7:10-15) as grounds for divorce. But there is no direct teaching in Scripture regarding remarriage after divorce. However, there is a strong implication in Jesus' words in Matthew 19:9 that would allow the remarriage of one who has remained faithful but whose spouse has been unfaithful to the marriage vow. (*Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, p. 163).
- **Same Sex.** Scripture never condoned same sex relationships. It's quite plain on this matter. (See: Genesis 19:4-10; Leviticus 18:22; 20:13; Romans 1:26-28; 1 Timothy 1:8). The Bible makes it clear that people with sexual orientation toward their own gender or towards other various deviations away from a Biblically principled heterosexual relationship, should be all treated redemptively with tender loving care.

Bible Discovery: Genesis 16; Leviticus 20:10-12; Psalm 101:3; Malachi 2:16; Matthew 5:27, 28; 19:6; 1 Corinthians 6:9, 13, 18; 7:15; Philipians 4:8; 1 Thessalonians 4:3

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, p. 403.3; *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 91.3 - 92.1; *The Adventist Home*, p. 341.3

8. What are some of the responsibilities of parents to their children and children to their parents? It is perhaps impossible to overemphasize the importance of the home! The family should be a safe place where father and mother express affection, affirm and correct their children, and help them to establish their identity and value through Christ. Here the parents

can reveal the character of God to their children in how they treat each member of the family, whether patient, kind and loving, or quarreling, angry and even cruel.

Scripture has given the husband and father the responsibility of being head and priest of the household, loving and protecting his wife and children as Christ loves and protects His church. As Christ went to the cross in servanthood, so the husband is to lead sacrificially, with the mind of Christ. Morning and evening he is to gather his family together and lead them in praising God and petitioning His protection and guidance over each family member.

Motherhood is the closest thing on earth to being in partnership with God. Educating her children to love Jesus and develop the fruits of the Spirit is a precious work. She must teach her children to respect and obey her, that their household will honor God. The mother is not to be a slave to her family but is to delegate responsibilities so her children will grow to be responsible and thoughtful adults. Through patient and consistent teaching and discipline, children must learn to share, respect property, and observe and respond to the needs of others. The mother may have many responsibilities but her most sacred duty is to prepare her children for life eternal with Christ.

Children have a right to their parents' companionship and temporal support, as well as their unconditional and accepting love. Likewise, children should honor and respect their parents, and, as adults, show tender care for them as they age.

Bible Discovery: Exodus 20:12; Deuteronomy 6:7-9; 27:16; Jeremiah 13:20; Galatians 5:22, 23; Ephesians 5:23-28; 6:1, 4; Colossians 3:18-21; 1 Timothy 5:4, 8

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *Fundamentals of Christian Education*, p. 65.3; *Counsels to Parents, Teachers and Students*, p. 124.3; *The Adventist Home*, p. 231.3

9. What are the biblical roles of the husband and wife? Both husband and wife should seek the good in the other and practice forgiveness (Matthew 6:14). Disappointment in the actions, words, or behavior of one's spouse comes into virtually every marriage at some point. Both husband and wife have the role of reconciliation, bringing grace into the relationship and strengthening the fraying marital bond.

God did not intend for male headship. After sin, it was intended to be a blessing to the wife, a solemn, sacrificial responsibility for the husband to practice servant leadership. Today, the concept is often misused as a rationale for abuse. What has become a curse, is reversed in an ideal marriage. (Song of Songs 7:10)

Marital shared roles include lover, friend, companion, and partner which encompasses mutual respect, mutual forbearance, mutual submission, and mutual obligations such as nurture, comfort, support, and sexual fidelity.

Bible Discovery: Genesis 18:19; Exodus 20:14; Proverbs 31:10-31; Ephesians 4:29, 32; 5:25; Philippians 4:8

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home*, pp. 106.1, 4; 231.1; 345.3

10. How does a single person find community within the church? While it is not good for man to be alone (Genesis 2:18), there are other ways besides marriage to find community and social interaction. Jesus is the model for how a single person can find community through sacrificial service, corporate worship, attending social events, and enjoying the family life of others (John 11:5). He found human connection in providing for the needs of humanity, bringing hope to the marginalized, the outcast, the poor, and the lonely. He also understands rejection, loneliness, abandonment, and harassment and identifies with those who also suffer from these results of sin.

Before marriage everyone is single. After a divorce a person returns to single status. After a spouse passes away, they are widowed. Some people are single throughout their life either by choice or circumstances. In all these cases, Jesus is the answer to the human dilemma of loneliness, isolation, and rejection. Our Savior longs to fill every heart with a sense of His presence and an understanding of His enormous, eternal love. His thoughts toward each of us are innumerable (Psalm 139:17, NLT)!

Bible Discovery: Exodus 25:8; Isaiah 54:5; Matthew 22:30; Mark 6:7; John 10:10; 1 Corinthians 7:32-35; Philippians 4:11

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *In Heavenly Places*, p. 120.4; *Selected Messages*, vol. 2, p. 248.4; *Gospel Workers* (1892), p. 424.1; *Testimonies on Sexual Behavior*, p. 255.4

11. What qualities should one seek in a spouse? The first questions to consider are, does the person whom I am considering for a life partner love Jesus? Is he or she a faithful, godly Christian? Does he or she exhibit loyalty, affection, forgiveness, contentment, courage, patience, and self-control? Does he or she show fidelity, or a flirtatious manner with others and a wandering eye?

A potential spouse should be hard-working and able to bear life's responsibilities. They should be good managers of money, showing thrift and industry.

It is often helpful to ask godly parents and close Christian friends to assess the relationship's likelihood of success and point out potential hindrances to marital harmony. Most importantly, ask God for wisdom. He wants you to have a happy home on this earth and live forever with Him!

Bible Discovery: Exodus 20:17; Proverbs 22:24, 25; 23:20, 21; Matthew 5:8; Exodus 20:17; 1 Corinthians 6:18; 13:4-7; 2 Corinthians 6:14; Colossians 3:13; James 1:5; 1 John 4:18

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 382.3; *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 359.3; *The Adventist Home*, p. 43.3

12. What impact will the biblical family have on society in the closing years of this earth's history? The Christian family, treasured in the heart of God Himself, will be the primary agent in winning and holding its members for the Lord. The very last verses of the Old Testament are an encouraging prophecy of what will take place before Jesus returns to gather His faithful family: "Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the Lord. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers" (Malachi 4:5,6). As mothers and fathers pray for the salvation of their children, the Spirit works to bring restoration to family ties and power to the family's witness.

The joyful observance of the seventh-day Sabbath strengthens the family's bond. The Sabbath, dedicated to the worship of God, provides time for the family to fellowship together with other believers in corporate worship, explore nature, and serve others. The model of a united family observing the Sabbath as a response to God's incredible grace will be a beacon of light and hope to a disintegrating society.

Bible Discovery: Exodus 20:8-11; Isaiah 58:13; John 14:15; 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18; Hebrews 10:24, 25; 2 Peter 1:19

Further Reading: Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance*, p. 535.3; *The Adventist Home*, p. 32.2; 18LtMs, *Manuscript 114*, 1903, par. 17

Reflection...

After God created Adam and Eve and joined them in matrimony, they formed the first family, the first church, and thus began the first community. It is God's intention that the family exemplify the love and harmony of heaven to the rest of the world. The secret to lasting love and contentment does not come from self-indulgence and seeking one's own interests, but rather from seeking to live by the ageless principles for great relationships as found in God's Word.

Next Step...

Life's challenges don't come out of a vacuum. In our next lesson, we'll discover a titanic struggle between good and evil, and each one of us is involved.

Discussion Questions

1. Why do many marriages fail?
2. What is God's purpose for marriage?
3. What does "an active, pursuing spousal love" mean to you?

Further Reading

Official Adventist Website: <https://adventist.org/marriage-and-the-family>

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Request a personal Bible study: <https://www.bibleschools.com/en/personal-studies>

Visit your local Seventh-day Adventist Church: <https://www.adventistlocator.org>

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