

A HOME IS FOR SHARING

by

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Theme: The truly Christian home has a faith and experience to share which can help and bless others.

Theme Text: Isaiah 39:4

Presentation Notes: Throughout the following outline, numbers in parentheses (1), (2), (3) will indicate items from the section called *Sermon Illumination* which may be used for illustration. The addition of your personal illustrations will enhance the presentation.

Isaiah 39 records a visit of emissaries from Babylon to Jerusalem. Delighted to entertain them, King Hezekiah gave a grand tour of his capital. His treasury, his depositories of gold and silver, his museums and archives where precious mementos, documents and artifacts were kept were all displayed. They saw his armory and weapons center. The record indicates that in particular he showed them those things that pertained to his rule as a monarch. No mention is made of showing the temple or explaining its services. After their departure, the prophet Isaiah came to the king with a sobering question, "What have they seen in thine house?" (Isa. 39:4).

Hezekiah did not lose the opportunity to display the trappings of his power. His visitors observed and returned home, but without discovering his spiritual treasure. The Psalmist declares that the revelation of God to mankind in His Word is more to be desired than gold (Ps. 19:10), yet Hezekiah evidently put little or no emphasis on the things which would have opened the eyes and hearts of these inquiring ambassadors to the knowledge of the true God. Isaiah refers to this more important revelation when he asks the king, "What have they seen in thine house?"

Stewards of the Lord's Home

Christians recognize that all that they have belongs to God. Over that with which He has entrusted us we are His stewards or managers. Like our time, talents, treasure and body temple, our homes belong to the Lord but are entrusted to us. We are stewards of our home which, in reality, is the Lord's home. God wants our houses and homes to be witnessing centers. We need to ask the question of ourselves today, "What have they seen in thine house?"

One renowned stewardship leader used to speak of "listening for the voice of God in our income," that is, listening for direction from God as to how we should use that which is His. In a similar manner we may lay our homes before Him, and prayerfully listen for His guidance in how all that is there, the resources of love and caring, as well as the physical accommodations, may be used in ministry for God. (1), (2)

What Should We Be Sharing?

Before the ambassadors from Babylon came, Hezekiah had just experienced a miraculous

recovery from a mortal illness. That turnabout in his health was accompanied by supernatural evidence of God's blessing in a most unusual event—the sundial moved backward 10 degrees. (See Isaiah 38:4-8.) A marvelous opportunity was thus afforded the king to share the precious truth of Jehovah with which he and his nation had been entrusted.

News about a Healer. The lesson from the life of Hezekiah is that Christians are called, not to show their material blessings of prosperity and their accomplishments, even though we may recognize these blessings to be from God. In the first instance we are to share, and allow all our interaction with others to spring from the awareness that we have needs in common with all humankind. We were sick, yes, dying. But there is One who has healed and continues to heal us. We were spiritually lost, but there is One who looked upon our condition, had compassion upon us, and saved us.

Using our homes for ministry may range from the simple offering of a drink of water to a neighbor child playing with our children, to inviting church members or visitors to a meal, to the radical hospitality of lending a room to an abuse victim or to a homeless addict while he or she is rehabilitated. It may mean conducting neighborhood Bible studies in our home, or giving time for personal counsel and prayer with someone. Happy are those who find opportunities to open the Word of God with another and share deeply of their faith. While our sharing may not always lend itself to an in-depth disclosure of our faith, the sharing of our homes must be founded upon the bedrock of biblical teaching about the gospel. While ministry may be driven by a variety of motives, ultimately the giving of the gospel alone makes service a great joy.

The gospel. The essence of what Christians have to share is the good news of the grace of God toward sinners manifested in the life, death and resurrection of Jesus. Apart from anything we could do, God loved us unconditionally and acted in our behalf. Christ identified Himself with us (Matt. 1:23). God looks upon the whole human race as being "in Christ," participating in His history, His life, His death and His resurrection (1 Cor. 1:30; Heb. 2:9; Rom. 5:14-19). Because of Jesus, God justifies the ungodly (Rom. 4:5) and does not reckon our sins against us (2 Cor. 5:19). We were dead in our sins, but, in Him, God considers us spiritually resurrected, raised and seated in heavenly places (Eph. 2:1). The call of God is for sinners to believe in Jesus, accept His atonement for us, and to walk worthy of the calling with which you were called (Eph. 4:1), letting God work in us to will and to do His good pleasure (Phil. 2:13).

The fruit of the gospel. The assurance of the gospel is found in being "in Christ," a spiritual reality accomplished by God which the believer grasps by faith. Alongside this, God wants to do a work in the life of the believer which the New Testament speaks of as "Christ in you" (Col. 1:27), the indwelling of the Spirit (Rom. 8:9), or Christ dwelling in the heart by faith (Eph. 3:17). The resulting lifestyle of the Christian is not the gospel per se, but the *fruit* of the gospel. The second coming of Jesus is not the gospel per se, but the *hope* of the gospel.

True Christian hospitality, the love, care and warmth displayed by a Christian home, comes from the hearts of individuals who have been touched and are being healed by the gospel. From our homes there will be the witness of a lifestyle and there may well be the sharing of many other Bible truths, all of which are important. But the distinctions must be kept clear between what truly constitutes the good news, and what is good advice or good information.

With Whom Shall We Share Our Home Resources?

The nearest mission field. "As workers for God, our work is to begin with those nearest. It is to begin in our own home. There is no more important missionary field than this."—*Child Guidance*, p. 476. "Our work for Christ is to begin with the family in the home. . . . By many this home field has been shamefully neglected, and it is time that divine resources and remedies were presented, that this state of evil may be corrected."—*Testimonies for the Church*, Vol. 6, pp. 429, 430. "You may be evangelists in the home, ministers of grace to your children."—*Child Guidance*, p. 479.

The first use to which the resources of our Christian homes are to be put is for the salvation of our own families. God intended the family to be a natural setting for carrying out Jesus' directive, Go and make disciples (Matt. 28:19). In the circle of a caring family one's deep and abiding needs for belonging, for love, for intimacy and for social contact are all addressed. Since it is in the family that one first learns about relationships, the Christian family possesses a remarkable potential for teaching about loving God and relating lovingly to others (John 13:35). By God's grace the family may be a powerful agency for the discipling of its members for Christ. (3) In our rush to work for others, we must not neglect members of our own homes. (4)

Reaching outside our homes. "The mission of the home extends beyond its own members. The Christian home is to be an object lesson, illustrating the excellence of the true principles of life. Such an illustration will be a power for good in the world. Far more powerful than any sermon that can be preached is the influence of a true home upon human hearts and lives."—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 352.

People in homes around us need what we as Adventist Christians are privileged to have in our families. The world is starving for love. For want of models of how real love can be born in the heart and can permeate family living, homes are suffering. Some divorce, some separate, others simply hang on as best they can, often warring under their roofs with each other or enduring pain and frustration. Those of us who are finding the way to successful Christian living at home have something to share so that others may see and know.

Vibrant witnessing centers. An important aspect of making our families missionary centers is to let others observe our relationships in marriage and family living, to participate in some way in our home experience. Many have no example of healthy family relationships to follow. They simply need to see how our homes and relationships work and how the Spirit of Jesus makes a difference.

For all, both old and young, married and unmarried, there is an abundance of human need in our neighborhoods that can benefit from the love which Christ brings to our homes and the special message He has entrusted us to share. Mission must become a way of life for us. We must find ways to build bridges of relationships to others. (5)

"Go to your neighbors one by one, and come close to them till their hearts are warmed by your unselfish interest and love. Sympathize with them, pray with them, watch for opportunities to do them good, and as you can, gather a few together and open the Word of God to their darkened minds."—*Welfare Ministry*, p. 64.

Bonds of friendship develop from acts of kindness and thoughtfulness that we show, from gifts we give, meals we share, time we spend with others in conversation on a level that deals with our and their inner feelings. Our homes provide us with countless opportunities for forming such friendships and sharing our Adventist Christianity with others. We must hurdle the barriers that often separate us from the families around us. (6)

Conclusion

"Our sphere of influence may seem narrow, our ability small, our opportunities few, our acquirements limited; yet wonderful possibilities are ours through a faithful use of the opportunities of our own homes. If we will open our hearts and homes to the divine principles of life we shall become channels for currents of life-giving power. From our homes will flow streams of healing, bringing life and beauty and fruitfulness where now are barrenness and dearth."—*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 355.

Sermon Illumination

One (1): The difference between entertaining and hospitality. "Entertaining says, 'I want to impress you with my beautiful home, my clever decorating, my gourmet cooking.' Hospitality, however, seeks to minister. It says, 'This home is not mine. It is truly a gift from my Master, I am His servant and I use it as He desires.' Hospitality does not try to impress, but to serve."—Karen Burton Mains, *Open Heart, Open Home*, p. 25.

Two (2): Home: A tool for ministry. Each of us can participate in some way in evangelism through hospitality—the use of the home as a tool of ministry. The genius of the home is that it is universal to each Christian. We all abide somewhere—in a room or a dormitory or an apartment or a bungalow. In this inhospitable world a Christian home is a miracle to be shared.—Ibid., p. 137.

Three (3): The nearest mission field. A recent study by Dr. Janet Kangas of more than 1500 Seventh-day Adventist youth in North America indicates that "the home is the most important religious influence."—Janet Leigh Kangas, *A Study of the Religious Attitudes and Behaviors of Seventh-day Adventist Adolescents in North America Related to Their Family, Educational, and Church Backgrounds*, Unpublished doctoral dissertation, Andrews University, 1988, Introductory abstract.

"Among the influences studied that could be isolated to the home, the church membership of both parents (as opposed to one or neither), the teenagers' perceived spiritual commitment of the parents, whether both biological parents were present in the home, and the frequency of family worship correlated significantly with teenagers' intentions to remain Adventists."—Ibid., p. 163.

Four (4): Mommy, why aren't you this nice to us? "Hospitality, like charity, in order to be true, has to begin at home."—Mains, p. 77. "Husbands, housemates, children, or strangely enough, their friends, often receive short shrift of our kindly attention. This point was brought forcibly home to me by my daughter, who cleverly exclaimed before a roomful of guests, 'Mommy, why aren't you this nice to us when people aren't here?' "—Ibid.

Five (5): We must become involved in other people's lives. "I believe that the church, when functioning properly, can provide healing for those who come. Within the church exists the necessary structure, the philosophical framework, and the power to deal with people and their problems. The power exists in the person of the Holy Spirit. But the church members must be willing to give up their isolation and total pursuit of material comfort in order to become involved in other people's lives. This is the only way out of loneliness and into community."—Brenda Hunter, *Beyond Divorce*, p. 56.

Six (6): Witnessing through hospitality. Pastor Samuel Monnier, retired General Conference Lay Activities leader known for his Maranatha and Lay Evangelists Training Seminars, relates the following experience of family life and hospitality:

"In our home after family worship on Sunday mornings we would have a family council and at that time would often select someone to invite to our home for a meal. My wife Yvonne and I would cast our votes for the children's choice. Then we would pray that the chosen individuals would

accept our invitation. When they did, we would pray daily that each one of our family might have a positive attitude and that our visitors would be touched by the Holy Spirit. Just before their arrival we would pray again for them.

Around our table I announced that we were Christians and enjoyed asking for God's blessing. Yvonne then designated one of our children to pray. Such prayers by our children always impressed the hearts of visitors. We deliberately did not speak about God, church or religion in our table conversation, though I would explain that we had made some personal decisions not to use alcohol or meat. Before our guests left our home I usually shared my testimony in about two minutes—how I became a Christian and the meaning of faith in my life. I would share a Bible promise and offer a prayer. In that prayer I recalled aspects of our conversation, expressing to our heavenly Father our care and concern for the various things that had been mentioned by ourselves and our guests.

Often our guests reciprocated by inviting us to their homes. We would respond and do our best to build the relationship, staying clear of topics related to church or God. I would have a small Bible with me and, before leaving their home, I would ask, "May I read a Bible promise; may I pray?" In this simple, practical way our family witnessed. When individuals were ready for more, we found ways of involving them in events at church, a concert, a film, later an evangelistic series. In all these events we would be with them. In this way we made many friends and saw many begin on the road to church membership."

References

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