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## Mentoring families for spiritual growth in a quest to end family violence, infidelity and divorce

Burton Munadimbwe Moonga \*

*Bachelor of Arts in Theology, Master of Arts in Pastoral Theology, Doctor of Ministry Fellow with Adventist University of Africa.*

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### Abstract

The fall of humanity negatively affected the relationship between God and Human beings. Isaiah 59:2 states that iniquities separate people from God and sins hid the face of God that He does not hear. There is a need therefore, to restore the relationship between God and people in order for life to be what God intended when he created man. Careful and incessant attention should be given to spiritual aspect of a person, which should result into a better relationship with the Creator. To have spiritual growth that will finally end into glorification, a positive relationship with God should be built. This may well be done in a family setting; because a family remains an important institution in the entire human history. Though important a family is, it is difficult to have a precise definition for the word family because it has many meanings depending on how it is used and the purpose for using it. Nevertheless, three elements are common when describing a family. These are marriage, parenthood and residence. In this article, the word family refers to a group of people who live together in a household due to marriage and parenthood. It is in this setting where mentorship should begin. In a family circle, effective mentors, who are dispensers of know-how are well placed in an age where morality has gone down and media has become the order of the day. Through family mentorship for spiritual growth, foundational values, for character development would be encouraged. These values are honesty, respect, kindness, empathy, and responsibility. The values can easily be promoted through family worship, Bible studies, prayer meetings and the involvement of the Holy Spirit in one's daily life. In turn, positive relationships among family members would be the result that would end family violence, infidelity and divorce. Mentoring families for spiritual growth will also restore broken relationships. The goal of mentoring families for the spiritual growth is to have peaceful families that are waiting for the second coming of Jesus Christ.

**Keywords:** Family; Mentoring; Divorce; Infidelity; Violence; Spiritual Growth

### 1. Introduction

The Bible declares that human beings were created in God's image (Genesis 1:26). Writing on our likeness to God, Wayne Grudem states that God created us so that our likeness to Him would be seen in our spiritual life and ability to relate to God who is spirit (Grudem, 2002). Unfortunately, the entrance of sin distorted the original plan of God. Sin affected human reasoning ability. A person's emotions are ever challenged by sin's presence. The depth of human interpersonal relationships, the equality and differences in marriage, which were perfectly originated by God, have been marred by sin. The good news is that there is progressive restoration "to greater Godlikeness through the salvation that is ... in Christ," which will only be completed when Christ returns (Grudem, 2002). The process of restoration into Christ-likeness is what is termed as spiritual growth in this article. This process can best be attended to in family circles.

\* Corresponding author: Burton Munadimbwe Moonga

### 1.1. Family

The word family has been defined in various ways. It has been observed by Skolnick (1997) that “courts are grappling with the problem of how to define family and kingship relationships.” According to Hogget and Pearl (1983), it is “a group of persons related to each other by blood and/or marriage.” Welshman Ncube, Stewart, et al (1997), reveal that “sociologists and anthropologists have variously defined the family as a ‘single household’ or as a group of persons living together and related by blood and/or marriage.” According to J. Ross Elshleman (1997), “Sociologically, the family is a social group, a social institution, and a social system.” Ncube, Stewart, et al finally conclude that “the term family is not capable of precise definition and that it has many meanings depending on the context and purpose for which it is being used and also depending on whether it is being defined from within or without, that is, internally or externally.” It is more challenging as noted by Elshleman that “a number of scholars question if the word family is even a meaningful concept.” Although this could be the situation, there are three elements that are common when describing a family. These are marriage, parenthood and residence. In this article, the word family refers to a group of people who live together in a household due to marriage and parenthood.

### 1.2. Mentor and mentoring

The Merriam Webster’s Collegiate Dictionary defines a mentor as a “trusted counselor or guide” (Webster, 2003). According to Paul Stephens, there is an assumption that mentors “are supposed to be experienced and trusted guides and advisors” like their ancient Greek predecessors (Stephens, 1996). Holden J is quoted by, Marleen P. Correia and Jona M. McHenry offering the following definition of a mentor:

“A mentor is a teacher of teachers. A mentor is an experienced, successful, and knowledgeable professional who willingly accepts the responsibility of facilitating professional growth and support of a colleague through a mutually beneficial relationship. A mentor is a friend with a positive attitude and a sense of humor. A mentor is an experienced teacher whose willingness to assist and support new teachers apparent in his or her attitudes, beliefs, and philosophies of teaching. A mentor is sensitive, discrete, wise, knowledgeable, and caring” (Correia and McHenry, 2008).

Stephens defines an effective mentor as a dispenser of know-how, and is contemplative. Stephens further believes that “good mentoring becomes even better when its exponents are also principled practitioners, and when they promote principled practice among those who would be teachers” (Stephens, 1996). In this regard, “A mentor ‘wears many hats.’ He or she is a teacher, a learner, a friend, a professional, a counselor, an advocate, and a leader” (Stephens, 1996). There is need to note also that mentors are not evaluators; they provide guidance by capitalizing on the mentee’s strengths (Stephens, 1996).

With the above definitions, I sum up a mentor as an experienced and knowledgeable person who is willing to accept the responsibility of facilitating support and growth “of a colleague through a mutually beneficial relationship” (Correia and McHenry, 2008). Regardless of the various terms and definitions associated with a mentor, “the need for mentors remains a constant” (Correia and McHenry, 2008). Those who are to be mentors should bear in mind that mentors share thoughts, ideas, materials, and expertise. They collaborate to keep an open mind and a nonjudgmental view. They listen patiently. Above all, they are friendly (Correia and McHenry, 2008).

Defining mentoring, Paul D. Stanley and J. Robert Clinton see it as “a relational experience in which one person empowers another by sharing God-given resources” (Stanley and Clinton, 1993). According to Delbert W. Baker, “Mentoring is simply a matter of relationship and partnership. Mentoring is I will help you do what I think you should do. Mentoring is discipleship with a kick” (Baker, 2017). Using the words of Solomon in Proverbs 27:17, I further define mentoring as a relational process of sharpening an individual by an experienced and knowledgeable person “as iron sharpens iron” with an intention of growth. Due to findings by a number of studies, it is concluded that mentoring matters for it raises retention rates by improving attitudes, feelings of efficacy, and instructional skills (Correia and McHenry, 2008). For mentoring to make a difference, the program is to be “well designed, supported, and part of a comprehensive induction model” (Correia and McHenry, 2008).

With the above insights, mentoring families for spiritual growth is defined here as a relational process of helping families to have a meaningful, growing relationship with God and one another. It is a process of assisting families to become true disciples of Jesus Christ. For this to take place, “the mentoring relationship should be conditioned by agape love, shalom, and righteousness” (Wakeman, 2020). One more thing to be explained is spiritual growth! Which is dealt with below.

### 1.3. Spiritual growth

In a quest to define spiritual growth, N. Krause et al, have discovered that researchers have not yet agreed upon a definition of spiritual growth. Nevertheless, N. Krause et al define spiritual growth as “the attainment of deeper religious insight, a stronger religious faith, and the development of more consistent and more sincere religious practices” (Krause et al, 2020). Gallagher and Newton define spiritual growth in general as “a process involving expansion of knowledge and experience related to spiritual or religious identity.”

Sally K. Gallagher and Chelsea Newton, in their specialized definition, they state, “Spiritual growth is a process that involves an expanding assessment and mastery of one's religious narrative and attachment to one's tradition, expressing itself through greater participation in corporate and private worship and institutional involvement” (Gallagher and Newton, 2020).

Having observed the above definitions, I borrow some of Adams' words to define spiritual growth as a process of growth out of sin into righteousness. Since the fall, God has been on a mission of redeeming mankind. Spiritual growth therefore, is a movement away from sin towards glorification. It is a movement that leads into a better relationship with God. The original nature of humanity, which was there before the fall needs to be restored. As argued by Deborah Schein that when spiritual development is addressed, it “can lead to a better society” (Schein, 2020). This may be attained when the spiritual part of an individual is attended to with a goal of becoming Christ-like. The ultimate goal of spiritual growth is therefore for human beings to be restored to their original state. This is in line with what Gallagher and Newton mean when describing the concept of growth. They write: “The concept of growth . . . suggests process, change, and movement toward a more mature developmental stage” (Gallagher and Newton, 2020). It is of value at this point to note what Adams states when it comes to spiritual growth. He declares: “Where there is spiritual life, there also will be spiritual growth” (Adams, 1972).

The relationship that was there between God and humanity got affected by the fall of humankind. Therefore, there is need to restore the spiritual relationship between God and people in order for life to be what God had intended. Careful and incessant attention should be given to spiritual aspect of a person, which should result into a better relationship with the Creator. To have spiritual growth that will finally end into glorification, there is need to build a positive relationship with God.

Jack O. Balswick & Judith K. Balswick observe that in various New Testament passages, the Christian life is described as growth from spiritual infancy to maturity (Balswick and Balswick, 1991). For growth to take place, there are certain things that are to be done. David Lawrence Preston notes: “Most religions have rules of behavior intended to help their devotees realize their spiritual nature” (Preston, 2007). Unfortunately, it has been reported by the leadership of the Seventh-day Adventist (SDA) Church that “personal commitment to participation in vital personal, familial, and corporate spiritual practices-especially in personal Bible study and family worship” had declined in most of her divisions (Personal Ministries handbook p: 9). If this is the true state of the church members, family mentoring for spiritual growth may be one of the solutions. There is need for connectedness within families. C. Margaret Hall (2020) found that “the quality of family connectedness has a strong influence on the behavior of the family members.” Though it can be biblically proven that the Holy Spirit and Christ are foundations to man's spiritual being, a family plays an important role as well. When families are shaky, chances are high that the spirituality of the members will be shaky too. When individual members of a family are spiritual, it means that Christ through the Holy Spirit is in control.

According to Helmut Haubeil (2017), “The spiritual person is the true Christian. He is called “spiritual”, because he is filled with the Holy Ghost.” It is vital therefore to daily seek for the in filling of the Holy Spirit if spiritual growth is to take place. This can be achieved by asking God according to Luke 11:11-13. It is important to note that “people who experience more spiritual growth will be more likely to derive a deeper sense of meaning in life; and . . . individuals who have developed a deeper sense of meaning in life will enjoy better health” (Krause et al, 2020).

It is unfortunate nowadays that Prosperity theologians “teach that poor people [poor in terms of material things] are unaware of the spiritual principles by which their wants and needs are satisfied by the Universal Source of Supply” (Preston, (2007). Prosperity theologians need to be aware that poverty comes in so many ways. Some people are born from poor families. Others loss their wealth like Job (Job 1:13-22), who was declared blameless and upright by God (Job 1:8). Jesus indicated that the poor would always be there (Matthew 26:11). On the other hand, there are rich people (materially) who do not believe in God. They have nothing to do with God. Therefore, being rich materially cannot be equated to the spirituality of a person. According to Krause, et al., “spiritual growth is hard work that may entail pain, conflict, and setbacks as well as personal reward” (Krause et al, 2020). This does not refer to material issues. Haubeil argues that a person is spiritual because he/she is filled with the Holy Spirit (Haubeil, 2017). Whether poor or rich, one

can be filled with the Holy Spirit and be declared spiritual. The belief by Prosperity theologians that it is unspiritual to be poor is unbiblical. Though material wealth is important, it is not a measure of a person's spirituality.

Therefore, there is need to be careful on how to use the word spirituality. This is so because by the twentieth century, this word "came to imply something that can be pursued in or outside formal religious traditions. Ledbetter and Banks (2016) define spirituality as "the feelings, thoughts, experiences, and behaviors that arise from a search for the sacred." In this case, the key issue will be on what an individual considers being sacred. The observation by Benjamin D. Schoun needs special attention here. Schoun (2009) states, "Many people in society are attracted to spirituality but not interested in a connection to the organized church." So the rules by religions may not be of use to them! In this regard, family mentoring for spiritual growth becomes essential. Haubeil's point on a spiritual person can easily be fulfilled in a family setting. According to him, "the spiritual person has committed himself essentially and completely to Jesus and as a general rule this is confirmed daily by surrendering himself to Jesus every morning with everything he is and has" (Haubeil, 2017). It is essential therefore to introduce Jesus as the source of life and everything in the early years of a person. This can be done well in a family setting.

Nature has something that can be learned, which can help to understand family spiritual growth. It is said that great laws govern the world of nature. Dependence is highly essential in nature. For anything to flourish it depends on other things. In like manner, there are principles that control spiritual things. It is observed that with spiritual life, "the means for an end must be employed, if the desired results are to be attained" (General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists, (2002). What is needed is to break the power of sin. It is believed that "through a life with the Holy Ghost and with Jesus in our hearts the power of sin is broken" (Haubeil, (2017). To see that there is growth spiritually, a pattern is needed that is to be followed. On this, it is written that "Christ gives us the pattern and the power to grow spiritually" (Life Application Study Bible, (1991). This is so because He "is the exact likeness of God" (Life Application Study Bible, (1991). By learning what he is like, we are able to see what we need to become. Therefore, it is imperative to nurture our connection to Jesus Christ. This is in line with what Jesus means in John 15:5-7 when he talks about himself being the vine and his followers being branches. To achieve this, it is observed that there is a need to live in constant contact and communication with God. This helps to unify a soul with Christ and with one another (Life Application Study Bible, (1991). The Bible is one of the means God communicates to mankind. The Bible must be studied with the help of the Holy Spirit in order to grow spiritually.

To those who are in charge of Bible studies and want to see spiritual growth and Christian maturity in their learners, they are advised to "aim at a behavioral and skill response in the learner. It is necessary [therefore] for learners to hear and understand biblical content" (Richards and Bredfeldt, 1970). On the other hand, it is noted that "no single class, no series of lessons, no year of lessons, will bring a student to absolute maturity in Christ or complete transformation" (Richards and Bredfeldt, 1970). Spiritual growth is a lifelong process. This calls for commitment. On this, Magesa states: "A person's religious commitment and identity are certainly indicated by his or her public profession to observe certain laws and perform certain rites and rituals" (Magesa, 1997). This could be the reason why Mamo concludes, "The spiritual journey of Christians is a journey of community" (Mamo, 2017). He further declares: "Without meaningful connection with a community of God a believer will not grow spiritually strong" (Mamo, 2017). A family that conducts Bible studies helps its members learn of God.

Spiritual families in this regard are crucial for family members to grow spiritually. It is true that God knows us as individual persons. It is also a fact, if not true, that "our journey and our eternal destiny are communal, for whatever we do or do not do as Christians, we are responsible before God and before the family of God" (Mamo, 2017). When parents and siblings take full responsibility of each family member's spirituality, it helps members of the family to see the importance of spiritual growth. Character development at this point becomes one of the means to help members learn more about Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

#### **1.4. Character development for spiritual growth**

On defining character, David A. Stoddard and Robert J. Tamasy state that it "is what is left after the fire" (Stoddard and Tamasy, 2009). They further explain that "it's the proof of who you really are as revealed after being tested and refined by life's experiences, in good times and bad times" (Stoddard and Tamasy, 2009).

Research has shown that morality has gone down compared to previous centuries (Skolnick, 1997). This is a wake-up call that something has gone wrong with human character. Having gone through the process of growing up, many if not all parents may agree that the process of growing up has challenges. It is important therefore as parents to review these challenges in order to be the best possible mentors for the children. Tor Tjeransen observes that to raise a child "requires sound strategies, patience and mental strength" (Tjeransen, 2019). It is unfortunate that nowadays people

who are given the responsibilities of looking after children may not have these qualities. In agreement with Tjeransen's observation, I therefore suggest that parents should have ample time of being with their children in order to develop good characters. It is believed that the "task of parents is to train the child as a student or disciple to become a person who knows how to live and act in relation to other people and society as a whole" (Tjeransen, 2019). When parents mentor their own children, chances are high that the results would be positive. This is so as argued by Stoddard and Tamasy that the substance of mentoring is character (Stoddard and Tamasy, 2009).

Parents who were well mentored as they were growing up are likely to be good mentors as well. We can only pass on to others what we have. In this regard, the definition Willie Oliver and Elaine Oliver give on character makes sense. According to them, "Character is not what we say – it is who we are" (Oliver and Oliver, 2018). They further state that a person's behavior reveals character (Oliver and Oliver, 2018). Since parents are mentors by default, their role in early child development, is the most influential (Oliver and Oliver, 2018). It is vital to note that good character is not acquired by memorizing of rules and regulations (Oliver and Oliver, 2018). If this is the case, how it is acquired needs special attention for mentors. According to Oliver and Oliver, "Character is made up of foundational values . . . honesty, respect, kindness, empathy, and responsibility" (Oliver and Oliver, 2018). This is in agreement with what Stoddard and Tamasy state on the important elements of character: honesty, integrity and ethics (Stoddard and Tamasy, 2009).

These values are becoming hard to come by in our societies today. The easiest way to acquire these attributes is through informal mentoring. Parents being mentors by default, they can easily pass on these attributes to their children. Oliver and Oliver observe that children may not do what their parents say but are more likely to do what they see them do (Oliver and Oliver, 2018). This concurs well with the saying: *Actions speak louder than words*. Advice is given that to raise responsible children, whose values are those of their parents; parents should treat their children as human beings (Oliver and Oliver, 2018). This means that chances are high that the way children are treated is the way they will grow up. If children are to be raised in a spiritual manner, those in charge of them should be spiritual. It is sad to note that many parents employ family helpers to look after their children without considering the spiritual aspect of these helpers. And these are the ones who are with children most of the time. If character is observable, it means many children are nurtured with the values of family helpers. This should be the concern of many families who live in the last days of human history, if families are to grow spiritually.

Some people have argued that children inherit some characteristics from their parents. If their argument is true, then the advice by Oliver and Oliver needs attention: "It is essential for parents to understand what their values are and how to transmit them into their children's character" (Oliver and Oliver, 2018). Tjeransen states that recognizing the inherited characteristics from both mother and father of a child is important as a parent when guiding a "child from infancy through childhood and adolescence into a mature adult" (Tjeransen, 2019). This helps in mentoring a child well. For an example, if a parent is a Christian and believes in Christ, it is necessary for him/her to show the children Christ like life as portrayed in the Scriptures. In order for parents to be effective mentors, they must let their values be seen and heard by their children (Oliver and Oliver, 2018). It is also believed that "when children get to practice what they have learned, the concepts become a part of them" (Oliver and Oliver, 2018).

Although human character was marred by sin, "the Lord wants us to develop a character like Christ." (Seventh-day Adventist Personal Ministries Handbook, (p:9). This is important because the only thing humanity will take to heaven is a Christ like character (Seventh-day Adventist Personal Ministries Handbook, (p:9). While parents play a bigger role in mentoring children, Ellen G. White states that all round perfect character is not inherited; neither does it come by accident. Through the efforts of each individual under the merits and grace of Christ, a noble character is earned (White, 1950). It therefore becomes a responsibility of each individual to earn a Christ like character.

To shade more light on character development, White's statement may be of help here. According to her, people form characters even though God gives talents and the powers of the mind (White, 1950). She goes on to say, character "is formed by hard, stern battles with self. Conflict after conflict must be waged against hereditary tendencies. We shall have to criticize ourselves closely, and allow not one unfavorable trait to remain uncorrected" (White, 1950). Developing a Christ-like character is possible when a person is working with Jesus Christ through the Holy Spirit. Although it is said by the Seventh-day Adventist Church that "strength to resist evil is best gained by aggressive service" (Seventh-day Adventist Personal Ministries Handbook, (p:9), it should be noted that service without Christ will not amount to anything that would bring spiritual growth. One of the ways that may enhance family spiritual growth is family worship which is my focus for the next section that follows.

### 1.5. Family worship towards spiritual growth

Before the issue of family worship is dealt with in details, the word worship needs to be defined. According to John S. Nixon, worship in its most basic formulation, “may be defined as respect and reverence offered to a divine being or supernatural power” (Nixon, 2009). Nixon further indicates: “The root of the word has to do with worth” (Nixon, 2009). This is also in line with how Michael Baughen defines worship: “Worship is, of course worth-ship” and he further points out that that worship is as “giving God the glory and honour which is due to him” (Baughen, 1983). When it comes to worshipping God, according to Nixon, there is need to recognize “the inherent worthiness of God apart from all other beings” (Nixon, 2009). Baughen states that worship is “an expression of our dependence upon him [God] and our submission to him as Lord” (Baughen, 1983). It is this dependence and submission that leads to spiritual growth as it may be observed in biblical characters such as Enoch, who walked with God 300 years (Genesis 5:22, 24), Noah who was declared righteous, blameless and also walked with God (Genesis 6:9), Abraham who is commonly known as the father of faith, and Ruth who having accepted the God of her mother in law followed her to Bethlehem in Judah (Ruth 1:16-17).

As Adams observes, Christian homes “come pitifully short of the Biblical norms” (Adams, 1972). He further states that, this is due to failures parents and children bring in the home; as sinners who live there (Adams, 1972). Though this could be the condition as Adams puts it, Chanshi Chanda states that those who believe, their lives are regulated and directed by religion (Chanda, 2016). This is in agreement with what J. Elizabeth Miller writes: “Religion is a powerful and pervasive force in shaping families” (Miller, 2000). If this is the case, the best foundation for spiritual growth is the family. A family tie is considered to be the closest tie among human beings. If religion becomes a family issue through family worship, chances are high that family members would be impacted positively and they would live according to biblical norms.

It is unfortunate today to note that many churches equate religion with material things. Chanda also discovered that material riches according to the teachings of some churches is equated with high spiritual life (Chanda, 2016). This makes wealth to be the center of worship. Chanda goes on to state that it should be known that too much wealth is not what leads to the kingdom of God (Chanda, 2016). Families should therefore be mentored not to center worship “on the human condition but the divine reality” (Nixon, 2009). The focus of worship should not be the worshipper – his/her needs, culture, or emotional or intellectual expression. Nixon puts well by stating that “the true focus of worship is God Himself: God’s attributes and perfections, God’s glory and majesty, God’s wisdom and will, God’s words and deeds past, present and future, toward the sons and daughters of men” (Nixon, 2009). If this is the case, then it calls for a closer relationship with God. It is this relationship that results into spiritual growth which can easily be groomed in family circles.

According to Nixon, “A right relationship to Jesus Christ, which determines a relationship to everyone else in life, directly relates to one’s spiritual condition” (Nixon, 2009). He further states that “nothing reveals a true spiritual condition like the beliefs, habits, and practices of the worship life. One can tell a lot about a church by observing its habits of worship, just as the life of personal devotion reflects the individual’s spiritual life” (Nixon, (2009). Since a family plays a significant role in human development, beliefs, habits and practices, worship life should be a norm for families if members of a family are to grow spiritually. According to Heubeil, it has been proven that “daily worship and the observance of the Sabbath are the foundation for a spiritual life.” (Heubeil, 2017). On daily worship, Hazel Moyo testifies that her once unhappy family became happy because of morning and evening family worship (Moyo, 2019). There could be many testimonies like this. In a family where there is father and mother, both parents should take a leading role when it comes to family worship. In this way, children and other family members will know that any parent who is around is concerned with family worship. This will help everyone to make family worship important even in the absence of all parents. Heubeil advises that family members should know that giving God priority over everything every day is the most important spiritual principle (Heubeil, 2017). In a sin afflicted world, many people are worried of what they will eat, drink or wear, almost all the time is spent in search of material things. God has given mankind instruction on how to go about day-to-day life in Matthew 6:33 where he says, “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness” then other things will be added to us. Heubeil emphasizes this point by stating that the “crucial thing is meeting our Lord in the morning for worship. It is here that He equips us with power” (Heubeil, 2017). This calls for discipline for families to be consistent in family worship and make it meaningful not mere obligation. Heubeil spots that worship can be just an obligation when we are carnal Christians. There is need for one to be spiritual in order for worship to become more and more a necessity (Heubeil, 2017). As a person engages in spiritual matters, there is need to always have it in mind that “God is Spirit, and those who worship Him must worship in spirit and truth” (John 4:25).

Finally, even though worship may be a powerful aid towards spiritual growth, it should be remembered that worship “stays as the central issue over which the great controversy began in heaven and will conclude here on earth” (Nixon,

2009). So, it is not easy to have family worship without disturbances and discouragements. As families, family worship should be taken seriously if family members are to grow spiritually. This is so because as Nixon (2009) notes “worship shows what our lives are truly based on.” It is interesting to note Martha Boone Leavell’s (1955) comment: “worship in the home is as old as the record of the human home itself.” It can be concluded that, family worship is not a product of sin. It is part of human life as created by God. Leavell (1955) states: “In that perfect relationship with the Creator there was a period ‘in the cool of the day’ when the family was in fellowship with God.” He goes on to state that during family worship, “there are two elements that should always be included . . . Bible reading and prayer” (Leavell, 1955). Other elements may be included depending on the allocated time. Here I concentrate on these two.

### **1.6. Bible study for family mentoring**

The Bible contains the revealed truth of God through the work of the Holy Spirit. When considering the importance of the Bible, Adams (1972) states that it is used as preventive measures in Christian homes. It is the standard for actions. It helps Christian homes to face the problems of a sinful world with God. Adams further observes that “a failure to study and apply the Word of God in the power of the Spirit” leads into family problems. In other words, I hear Adams is saying the study of the Bible as a family helps to avoid family problems. This is in line with Paul’s writings when he states that the Holy Scriptures are “useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting, and training in righteousness so that all God’s people may be thoroughly equipped for every good work” (2 Tim 3:16-17). The Seventh-day Adventists, *Adult Sabbath School Study Guide* indicates that “one of the most powerful testimonies of the power of the Bible is the changed life of a person” (General Conference of the Seventh-day Adventists, (2020). When problems are solved in a Christian home through Bible study, the result will be spiritual growth. Important as it is to study the Bible for spiritual growth, it should always be accompanied with prayer.

### **1.7. Prayer: mentoring families for spiritual growth**

It is written in the Bible that we are to pray continually (1 Thess. 5:17). Baughen (1983) has called prayer a weapon for spiritual battle. This makes prayer imperative when it comes to spiritual growth. Unfortunately, some worshippers have misapplied 1 Thessalonians 5:17. According to Chanda (2016), “there are . . . religious teachings that elevate prayer and faith in the divine as the only thing one needs to become wealth instead of also encouraging hard work, prudence, knowledge, creativity and advocacy.” This should not be. Baughen puts it right by stating: “When we see a material need, we are to meet it by action and giving if possible. When we see a spiritual need, we should meet it with action and praying.” To this, we have an example to follow when it comes to balancing work and prayer. Christ’s life here on earth is a perfect example for us in order to grow spiritually. While doing all he had to do here on earth, Smith (2013) indicates that “Christ maintained His oneness with the Father . . . during His seasons of prayer.” How did he manage to do this? He did so because “praying is [simply] the act of communicating with God” (*Couple’s Bible*, 2019). Jesus needed to have an intimate relationship with God for His mission on earth to be accomplished. Families and individuals too need to have an intimate relationship with God through prayer in order to promote spiritual growth and better lives.

It has been observed by Campbell and Chancy (2009) that “having an intimate relationship with God requires two-way communication, talking to God as well as learning to listen to Him.” Is this possible in this busy world? It is said where there is a will there is a way. In this regard, Smith (2013) encourages that “If we want to experience the deep things of God, the fullness of Christ in our lives we must yield to this desire to pray.” It has been noted that human beings are creatures of habit. If this is the case, the more one engages in prayer, praying will eventually be a habit. Families are to be encouraged to teach children how to pray without ceasing.

It is crucial to note that “the center of religion in the Bible” is prayer (*Couple’s Bible*, 2019). For this reason, Smith encourages that an atmosphere of prayer must surround us continually in order to have Christ with us always for it is the presence of Christ in our lives that helps us grow spiritually (Smith, 2013). It is the communion with God that ennoble the character and the life (Seventh-day Adventist Personal Ministries Handbook, (p:9). When a family is oriented to pray in the morning before going for work and in the evening before going to bed, it helps to be in the presence of God. One may ask what it means to be in the presence of God if God is omnipresent. Since he is ever-present, people are to be trained to ever have it in mind that God is with them. Through prayer, this can be achieved. It has been observed by Eshleman (1997) that “families that pray together, stay together, irrespective of religioethnic orientation.” Though human beings are social beings, some families fail to stay together simply because something has gone wrong spiritually. Families are encouraged to learn from prayers that were offered in the New Testament which according to Baughen (1983) were “concerned with the spiritual growth of believers.” Through prayer, character is being shaped towards perfection. Prayer gives spiritual power. Families are to pray without ceasing in order to promote spiritual growth. This will be achieved through the helper, the Holy Spirit, Jesus promised to send, who has already come.

### **1.8. The holy spirit: mentoring families for spiritual growth**

It has been observed by Newton (2001) that though being “the major catalyst to the educational process of learning and growing towards Christlikeness, the Holy Spirit’s role is often overlooked or at least taken for granted.” The Holy Spirit plays a vital role when it comes to spiritual growth. Jesus Christ called him the Counselor, the teacher and reminder of what Jesus said. He is further called the Spirit of truth (John 14:26). The nature and work of the Holy Spirit could be the reason why Smith (2023) wrote: “When one enters into the deeper spiritual experience under the Holy Spirit’s influence, he will develop a much keener sense of his own unworthiness. This sense of unworthiness will be the motivating factor leading him more frequently to prayer and to a deeper dependence on Christ.” Accordingly, it has been noted by Newton (2001) that, “Intimacy with the Holy Spirit draws a person into an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ.” It is the dependence on Jesus Christ that helps believers to be like him.

As families are being mentored for spiritual growth, it is important for members to depend on one another; but their ultimate dependence must be on Jesus. In a world where hatred has become the order of the day to a point where spouses kill their once beloved ones, the only source of hope is the presence of the Holy Spirit in one’s life. This is so because, the Holy Spirit gives Christian love (Galatians 5:22). When the Holy Spirit is allowed to do his work in a family, there will be spiritual growth. Being the Counselor, the Holy Spirit helps to cement relationships. It has been written: “Only the Spirit of God can transform hearts and enable people to observe His [God’s] laws and instructions.” (*Andrews Study Bible*, (2010)). This is how central the Holy Spirit is when it comes to spiritual growth. For families to grow spiritually, the presence of the Holy Spirit in the homes is paramount.

### **1.9. Mentoring family relationships for spiritual growth**

Stanley and Clinton (1992) observe that relationships “have potential for empowering a person who desires to learn and grow.” Mentoring relationship, is not a static process. Correia and McHenry (2008) state that mentoring relationship is “dynamic, evolving a relationship that goes through cycles and phases as determined by individuals involved.” They also mention that there are other factors that need to be considered such as background, particular needs, as well as time (Correia and McHenry, 2008). When it comes to family mentoring for spiritual growth, it is of value to note how vital the relationship is in and of itself. According to Balswick and Balswick (1991), in order for the relationship to grow, it needs to be nourished. Their insight is very important, because if a relationship is not nourished, it can easily be destroyed. To protect a relationship, factors that can help or hurt the process of mentoring relationship need to be known. According to Correia and McHenry (2008), the church ... culture and climate are at the center of the factors that can help or hurt the process of mentoring relationship. These can best be monitored in a family circle.

When it comes to mentoring family relationships for spiritual growth, it would be better to start with Genesis 2:18 where God declared that man should not be alone for it is not good. From this point of view, God created the first family that has led to the existence of all the families of this world. Surprisingly enough, it is said, “Psychologists and other scientists are discovering that humans are wired to intimately connect with another human being” (Oliver and Oliver, 2018). If they are discovering what God said during creation time, it sounds like they do not believe in God; or the Word of God is forgotten. What is needed is simply to affirm what God said. Eshleman (1997) puts it well by stating that the family is a divine and holy institution, created and maintained by God. Being such an institution, members of the family need to grow spiritually with a goal of becoming like Christ.

Many problems humanity faces today are a result of human failure to recognize and use God’s instructions to have better relationships. A focus on spiritual growth from a family point of view may help cement relationships in families, churches and communities at large. Balswick and Balswick, (1991) argue, “Since relationships are dynamic and ever changing, if a relationship does not spiral into deeper levels of commitment, grace, empowerment, and intimacy, then it will stagnate and fixate on contract rather than covenant, law rather than grace, possessive power rather than empowering, and distance rather than intimacy.”

Hibbert (2018) observes that due to broken relationships and ongoing patterns of poor interpersonal interaction, many people are lonely and traumatized. A lonely and traumatized person is in most cases at risk of so many dangers. A human being needs a helping hand as God stated during creation week. Concerning spiritual issues, relationships are of huge significance. Good human relationships create an environment that is conducive for spiritual growth. In most cases, people sin against God due to what they do towards their fellow human beings. Research has found that lonely and traumatized people have a “felt deep longing . . . for a community where they feel like they belong and which can help them to build healthy sustainable relationships” (Hibbert and Hibbert, 2018). The best starting point to attend to these people’s needs is the family. If families are mentored towards spiritual growth, a solution may be found towards this deep longing.



To show how critical relationship is for spiritual growth, Hibbert and Hibbert (2018) has this to say: “Millet who observed a community of believers . . . found out that Jesus had the ability to deal with problems in relationship, provide instructions for family life, help them to know how to live a righteous life without being continually concerned about legalistic rules, and bless them in many other ways.” There are families, churches and communities today that are more concerned with rules at the expense of relationships. As a result, a number of people are no longer interested in rules. According to *Life Application Bible* (1991), obedience is a result of a relationship with God, it is not obedience that creates or earns this relationship. If this is the case, one’s relationship with God will tell how his/her relationships will be with others. Therefore, in mentoring families for spiritual growth, it is essential to emphasize one’s relationship with God that would result into a better human to human relationship.

### **1.10. Relationship with God**

It is noted that because of the fallen nature of humanity, people fail in “aspects of relationship with God.” (Balswick and Balswick, 1991). According to Heubeil, people can be put into three groups when it comes to relationship with God. The first group is of those with no relationship with God. The second is composed of those with divided or feigned relationship with Him; and the last is of people with full, real relationship with Him. The Bible calls the first group as natural man, while the second team is called the people of the flesh or carnal. The last category is of spiritual people (1 Cor 2:14-16; 3:1-4) (Heubeil, 2017). When mentoring families for spiritual growth, it is essential to have in mind these groups. The aim is to have families belong to the third group, composed of spiritual people. This is so because, when Jesus comes the second time, he is coming for spiritual people.

The presence of God in every family is paramount for the family’s spiritual growth. Bonhoeffer’s (1979) statement encourages me when he states that Christ as a mediator stands between father and son, husband and wife whether they are able to recognize him or not. To me, this means that, in all the three groups mentioned above, Jesus is present. In this case, what is needed is simply to awake families to His presence. Bonhoeffer (1979) describes a way of establishing a relationship with God. He states that it is through Jesus, through His Word, and through following Him that can establish a relationship with God. He goes on to mention that there is no direct contact with God outside us apart from that of Jesus. This is what the words of Jesus mean in John 15:1-8 concerning the vine and the branches. It is only when a person remains in Jesus that he/she can bear fruits. When families grow spiritually through being attached to Jesus Christ, they will also bear the fruit of the Spirit, which is “love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness and self-control” (Galatians 5:22). The fruit of the Spirit is a signal that there is spiritual growth. So as families are being mentored for spiritual growth, Galatians has given what to measure with. When spiritual growth takes place, where there was no love there will be love. Instead of killings and divorces experienced in some families, when families are mentored spiritually, the fruit of the Spirit will be manifested.

From the above discussion, it can be concluded that for spiritual growth to take place, one’s relationship with God should be monitored. One may ask how can this be done? Lawrence O. Richards and Gary J. Bredfeldt (1970) state that prayer, Bible study, worship, meditation, praise, confession and honest help to build a relationship with God. Through these avenues, the fruit of the Spirit can be seen. In summing it up, it has been written by Heubeil (2017) that it is only through the Holy Spirit that one can have a real personal relationship with Jesus (John 3:24).

### **1.11. Relationship with family members**

Relationship with family members has a lot to tell. White (1980) states that when a family is “well-ordered, well-disciplined . . . , [it] tells more in behalf of Christianity than all the sermons that can be preached.” Looking at church worship systems these days, my local church buildings are full to capacity during preaching hour, the so-called main service. During the church at study, in the afternoon, many church buildings are not even half full. Many people miss important lessons every week. For family members to receive vital lessons for life, the focus on family mentoring for spiritual growth becomes cardinal. White (1980) notes that a well-ordered, well-disciplined “family gives evidence that the parents have been successful in following God’s directions, and that their children will serve Him in the church. The kind of relationship that exists in a family may easily tell the spirituality of the family members. Mamo (2017) observes that in a well-ordered, well-disciplined family, “a clan member or family member is always protected and others are treated as outsiders.” It is unfortunate to note that the concept of family as Mamo (2017) indicates, “is so distorted that using it as a spiritual concept needs careful contextualization.” White (1980) concludes it so well by indicating that the greatest evidence of the power of Christianity that can be presented to the world is a well-ordered, well-disciplined family.” It is therefore cardinal to mentor family members for better relationships in order to promote spiritual growth.

### 1.12. Marital relationships

According to research done by Fitzpatrick and Wampler (2000), “new couples face many challenges in their relationships with each other and their extended family.” Some of these challenges negatively affect the spiritual life as well. Some people seem to be highly dedicated to God’s work before they get married and once, they are married, they drastically become uninterested in spiritual matters. Sometimes the opposite happens. Those who were weak spiritually before they got married, become strong when they are married. This is a sign that marriage affects people differently.

One of the things that has effects on marital relationships is equal rights. Ncube, Stewart, et al (1997), observe that there are people who seem not to understand the term “equal rights.” Usually, the term has been abused causing family hostilities. When mentoring families for spiritual growth, husbands and wives should know that the term *equal rights* simply “means sharing responsibilities according to capability” (Ncube, Stewart, et al, 1997). Quoting the words of Paul in 1 Corinthians 11:7-12, Grudem (2002) makes a conclusion that “men and women are interdependent . . . and that we could not exist without each other.” This is in line with the creation story of man; without Eve, it was not good for Adam to be alone (Gen 2:18). To make it good, God initiated marriage by creating Eve. To underscore the importance of marriage, the Scripture has used marriage “as a symbol of the relationship between God and the Church” (Couples’ Bible, 2019). In this regard, the spiritual relationship between husband and wife should be taken seriously. If left unattended to, it affects the family in many ways. According to Balswick and Balswick (1991), marriages have proved to be strong “if both partners are committed . . . to the relationship, and to each other as persons.” This is so because marriage is a commitment to the relationship. Balswick and Balswick (1991) further discern that to have a balanced commitment, it should be towards a person, marriage as an institution, and relationship. It is unfortunate to note that this balance they emphasize is rare in many marriages today. With a deep spiritual commitment, which balances the three areas, there would be no need to hate each other. Each one will be viewed as created in the image of God growing towards perfection as partners.

From a biblical point of view, it can be deduced that marriage relationships are very important to God. The institution of marriage features so prominently in the creation story of Genesis 1 and 2, in Jesus’ sermon on the mount, in Matthew 5, and in the first miracle Jesus performed at the commencement of His earthly ministry, in John 2. Whereas marriage is important to God, it is evident that the “fall affected the relationship of the couple and introduced grave consequences especially for the woman who gradually fell into a state of subordination to man (Gen 3:16-17)” (Couples’ Bible, 2019). Although the functional differences between men and women will always exist, the divine plan of the salvation of mankind is to reverse the effects of sin with regards to any discrimination including gender discrimination. There is hope for families as noted by Oliver and Oliver, (2018) that it is possible for couples to “stay happily married for a lifetime, minimize distress, and stay out of the divorce courts.”

Grudem (2002) observes that whenever the husbands and wives fail to listen “respectfully and thoughtfully to each other’s viewpoints,” they are neglecting the teaching on equality in the image of God as stated in Genesis. Nevertheless, it must be remembered that there are roles given to the husband and to the wife. Grudem (2002) states that a reversal of these roles creates a strain on a marriage, which in turn affects the spiritual life. Some people argue that these roles do not exist according to Galatians 3:28. Unfortunately, they misinterpret the verse. Looking at the entire verse, Paul deals with issues of unity. There is need to know according to Grudem (2002), that the agenda for the pagan “is the elimination of the distinction between male and female.” Those who want to grow spiritually by all means should avoid this agenda of the pagans.

In concluding marital relationship, the “five essential building steps for a strong and healthy marriage” by Oliver and Oliver (2018) are worthy noting. These are: build your marriage on real love, accept each other’s faults and imperfections, listen to each other, forgive often, and hug more. Where there is real love in a marital relationship, possibilities of growing spiritually are high for real love guarantees security and gives hope.

### 1.13. Parents and children relationship

Balswick and Balswick, (1991) found out that “in most societies parents simply expect their children to grow up to be normal, healthy adults-no special techniques are deemed necessary.” From a biblical point of view, this should not be. God has repeatedly talked about training children in a godly way. Deuteronomy 6 and Proverbs 22 call upon parents to train up children. Looking at life today, both informal and formal mentorship are the best ways of bringing up children in the Lord. It is essential to note as written in the Couples’ Bible 2019 that, “Jesus never said it was vital that our children be like us. He did say, however, it was crucial that we be like them.” In Matthew 18:3 (NIV), Jesus said: “Truly I tell you, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven.” Does this mean that adults must behave like children? Or does it mean that the little ones must dictate the behavior of the parents? When

dealing with children aged between two to seven, Tjeransen (2019) argues that little ones should not dictate the behavior of their parents. I do agree with Tjeransen.

The Oliver and Oliver (2018) state that nowadays, children “are more prone to depression, anxiety and impulsive behavior.” Jesus did not mean that parents are to imitate this kind of behavior when he said that there is need to be like little children. As indicated by Oliver and Oliver (2018), “parents are still the best protection against children participating in risky behaviors such as drug and alcohol use, premarital sex, and eating disorders.” It is further observed by the Oliver and Oliver, (2018) that those “parents who daily take an active role in raising their children . . . eventually reap the rewards of seeing their children grow into healthy and responsible adults.” When it comes to discipline in a situation where both parents are there, the counsel by Tjeransen (2019) needs to be heeded. It is important to make sure that parents are on the same page so that the children do not “play one parent against the other.” When children are allowed to play one parent against the other, in most cases the result is the broken relationship. This can be avoided when parents work as a team.

As parents, there is need to spend time with children “in meaningful day-to-day activities” (Tjeransen, (2019). Tjeransen (2019) further states that the time parents spend with their children is a key factor in performing well in their tasks as role models and mentors. Tjeransen also mentions something that needs careful analysis as he writes on ages eleven to sixteen, he states: “While . . . [children] are our offspring, we do not own them. They are individuals in their own right and [children] must learn to handle life on their own” (Tjeransen, (2019). This does not mean that parents are to leave their children to do whatever they want. This simply means that parents are to follow God’s instructions in raising children.

It is unfortunate as observed by Tjeransen (2019) that it is a real shock for some parents when their children become teenagers. The relationship that parents appreciated before their children became teenagers negatively changes. This is due to unpreparedness on the side of parents “for the profound changes in the relationship between themselves and their [children].” If this is the case, there is need therefore to prepare parents for this change. This will help parents to mentor their children rightly and in turn help them grow spiritually.

#### **1.14. Communication**

According to Stanley and Clinton (1972), “throughout human history, mentoring was the primary means of passing on knowledge and skills in every field.” They further note, “in the modern age, the learning process shifted. It now relies primary on computers, classrooms, books, and videos. Thus, today the relational connection between the knowledge-and-experience giver and the receiver has weakened or is nonexistent” (Stanley and Clinton, (1972). This could be the reason why currently many families face relational challenges. There is need to pay attention on how knowledge is passed on from one generation to another. The custodians of truth in each generation should make sure that it is well passed on to the next generation.

It has been noted by Balswick and Balswick, (1991) that communication “is the heart of family life in that family members interact through verbal and nonverbal exchanges to express their core emotions.” It is through communication that thoughts and feelings of family members are expressed. Family members get to know each other through communication. Balswick and Balswick, (1991) discovered that “with an increase in ability to communicate . . . the family can become a healthy, vibrant community whose members love and care for each other.” This is the ideal that families should strive for. It is unfortunate that these days, “people are more influenced by what is on the media than by their physical friends or families. As a result, people turn out to be disciples of media and popular culture” (Mamo, (2017). Though spiritual messages are on media, one can tell through comments and likes on posts that few people have time to read and listen to these messages.

It has been spotted by Mamo (2017) that “as the modern culture separate individuals from community, believers lack a support system, and that impedes their growth to maturity.” Oliver and Oliver (2018) have noted that due to lack of effective communication, most relationships experience distress. I can conclude that due to this distress, there is a hindrance to spiritual growth. No wonder, Adams (1972) when commenting on Ephesians 4 sees the subject of communication as the first one in restoring the image of God in one’s daily walk. He further states that good communication leads into a healthy relationship between husband and wife, parents and children. (Adams, 1972). This in turn creates an environment, conducive for mentorship that may lead to spiritual growth.

Finally, the following verses are to be considered when it comes to communication. James 1:19 states: “Understand this my dear brothers and sisters: You must be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry.” By listening, a lot of problems are solved. By being slow to speak, it helps to find pleasant words that are likened to a honeycomb, which are

“sweet to the soul, and health to the bones” (Proverbs 16:24). Sin has brought problems since the fall of humanity. Nevertheless, there is hope by noting that through love and good communication, “most problems, even the ‘big problems,’ can be solved and resolved” (Gray, e-books). For families to be mentored for spiritual growth, communication is one of the platforms that can be used. Let effective communication be promoted in every home that will create positive relationships which in turn will attend to the destroyers of family spirituality.

### **1.15. Destroyers of family spirituality**

While the insights discussed above may help mentor families for spiritual growth, it is also important to look at some destroyers of family spirituality. Looking at social institutions, Eshleman (1997) believes that the family of all institutions “should be the haven where love, serenity, and kindness, prevail in the midst of an often impersonal, uncaring, crime-filled, and violent world.” This indeed is the model as originally planned by God. Though this is the ideal, the situation on the ground in many families is the opposite. In order to attain the best for spiritual growth, the following destroyers of family spirituality need to be attended to.

### **1.16. Family violence**

As he writes about family violence, Richard Gelles (2000) defines violence as: “Any act carried out with the intention, or perceived intention, of causing physical pain or injury to another person.” According to Eshleman (1997), “Reports of family members killing one another, husband and wife beatings, marital rape, incest, elderly and sibling abuse, and other variations of violence among intimates are common.” Dealing with a wide range of family violence, Gelles (2000) concludes: “Concentrating on just one form of violence or abuse may obscure the entire picture and hinder a more complete understanding of the causes and consequences of violence and abuse between intimates.” Since this article focuses on family spiritual growth, violence is considered to be one of the hindrances to spiritual growth. It is believed that conflict is inevitable “as couples interact, as they define and redefine their relationship with one another, over work, over children, over criticism, over in-laws, over expenditures, over sex, over politics . . . even over matters such as how one should squeeze the toothpaste” (Eshleman, (1997). Even though this may be the case, it does not give permission for violence. Family members are to be mentored on how to handle conflicts to avoid violence so that spiritual growth can be promoted. It should be remembered that violence is a result of sin. If allowed in a family, it also destroys the spirituality of the family. By all means, all those who wish to grow spiritually, should avoid violence. To a certain extent, peace is a catalyst for growth while violence does the opposite.

### **1.17. Infidelity**

In dealing with God’s ideal for marriage, fidelity has proved to be promoted throughout the Old and New Testaments. Whitaker (2009) has argued that “. . . only the book of Matthew has the one verse in the New Testament that gives a possibility for remarriage after a divorce if a spouse is still living . . .” Whitaker (2009) further observes that the entire New Testament agrees that remarriage while a spouse is living is adulterous. This informs humanity how negative the impact of infidelity is to a family. As families are being mentored for spiritual growth, Whitaker’s (2009) conclusion on marriage should be emphasized: “Marriage - a covenant between one man and one woman, until death.” This can only be achieved if immorality is understood as an antilife force (Magesa, 1997). Young people need to be mentored using Whitaker’s formula for marriage so that by the time they are marrying, this will be part of their lifestyle.

### **1.18. Divorce**

Many scholars agree that God designed marriage to be permanent. One interesting thing about divorce is that it can be traced way back to the fall of Adam! When Eve was created, Adam said “bone of my bones and flesh of my flesh; she shall be called Woman, because she was taken out of Man” (Genesis 2:23). This was a confirmation by Adam that he was one with Eve. Being one flesh, they were to be permanently one! But after eating the forbidden fruit, Adam said to God, “The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I ate” (Genesis 3:12). At this point, Adam is separating himself from the bone of his bones, flesh of his flesh by blaming the woman and God. The good news is that God still did not permit divorce at this time. He said to the woman: “Your desire shall be for your husband” (Genesis 3:16). In other words, it is like God is saying I made you to be one eternally. In the entire Old Testament, I do agree with Köstenberger (2004) and Jones that God “does not approve divorce.”

Whitaker (2009) notes that there was a time when marriage was “considered the foundation upon which a stable family rested. . . . [unfortunately], that is no longer the case.” Sadly, it has been observed by Whitaker (2009), which I do agree that most of the modern churches have become “silent on the issue of divorce and remarriage. Biblical precepts are ignored in favor of cheap grace. Families are destroyed and children carry the scars of divorce into adulthood.” It is sad to note the observation by Whitaker (2009) that only a minority of ministers still “believe that marriage is permanent while a spouse is living.” In order to deal with divorce issue successfully, there is need to accept Whitaker’s (2009)

words when he says divorce and remarriage are an “elephant in the living room that everyone wants to ignore.” These insights call for a strong, steady, consistent discussion on family mentoring for spiritual growth. Family mentors have a lot to do in this area in consultation with what the Bible says to keep the permanence of marriage according to God’s original plan.

Looking at Adventism statistics on divorce, Whitaker (2009) observes that the current generation has a high rate than the previous ones. On the other hand, Miller (2000) states that the likelihood of divorce is less among religious individuals. Miller’s finding should give a challenge to Adventism! In cementing his point, Whitaker (2009) concludes that Adventism has “produced a generation of young people whose loyalties are not to organizations, such as schools and churches, and, sometimes, not even to their families. Instead, their loyalties are to their peers, and they show up where their friends are.” This calls for serious family mentoring to arrest this situation. Young people are to be mentored on how to avoid divorce as early as possible before they turn their loyalties to their peers.

Finally, it is heart breaking to read about Whitaker’s (2009) observation that there are “people who . . . [are] still hurt over their parents’ divorce, even after twenty, thirty, and forty years.” To a certain level, this keeps affecting their spirituality. One of the best solutions to this dilemma is both informal and formal family mentoring through the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Magesa (1997) argues well by stating that “our understating of marriage and procreation should be based on the pro-life criterion.” Before people get married, they are to be mentored to mature spiritually for them to be able to handle marital challenges. For those who are already in broken relationships, there is room for restoration as it is discussed in the section below.

### **1.19. Restoring broken relationships**

Broken relationships come in different forms. I have come across many young ladies who constantly complain of broken relationships before they are married. Their boyfriends who are their fellow church members have disappointed them. This type of brokenness sometimes goes a long way even when they get married. On the other hand, many couples have unstable relationships due to various reasons. Some of these reasons are infidelity, barrenness, and issues pertaining to in-laws. Because of these insecure and broken relationships, many families find it difficult to grow spiritually. In order to promote spiritual growth among family members, it is necessary to find means of restoring broken relationships.

The starting point will be to find out what is required to restore a broken relationship. According to Yusufu Turaki (2012), there are two sides of restoring a broken relationship. The first one is the human side. This one is achieved by observance of taboos, and prescribed ceremonies and rituals. The second side is the spirit one. Here, “the gods and spirits may themselves communicate with an individual to indicate what is required to restore a broken relationship.” There may be some sense in what Turaki says. On the other side, Evelyn and Richard Hibbert’s (2018) observation may be an eye opener too. According to them, participation during rites of passage cements community identity. For those who do not participate, their absence is strongly felt by their families and friends. Usually, their absence is viewed as a rejection. If what they have observed is the case, once it happens, it means that a relationship is broken.

From a biblical point of view, iniquities cause broken relationships (Isaiah 59:2). When the relationship between God and humanity is broken, in most cases the result is also broken relationships among human beings. Therefore, the restoration of the relationship between God and humanity will normally result into a better relationship among human beings. In 1 John 1:9, God is faithful and just to forgive confessed sins. God is waiting upon humanity to confess the sins. In Matthew 18:15-19, Jesus gives steps on how to maintain a relationship in case of wrongs. Furthermore, the Bible recommends that we are to confess our sins to each other and to pray for each other (James 5:16). It can be settled that sincere confession of sins to God and each other is the means of restoring broken relationships. When broken relationships are restored, growth spiritually will be promoted.

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## **2. Conclusion**

Mentoring is simply one person sharpening another “as iron sharpens iron” (Proverbs 27:17) with an intention of growth. On the other hand, spiritual growth in simple terms is growth out of sin into righteousness. Spiritual growth is therefore a movement that leads into a better relationship with God. It is a process of becoming like Jesus. Character development should always be seen as an important element for spiritual growth. Worship, Bible study, and prayer are means towards spiritual growth. The Holy Spirit has been seen as an agent for spiritual growth. When relationship with God, relationship among family members, relationship between spouses, and parental relationship are well cared for, spiritual growth will easily be encouraged. Relationships can easily be enhanced through effective communication, which is an essential element for spiritual growth. Families need to be careful with destroyers of family spirituality.

Some of the destroyers of family spirituality are family violence, infidelity and divorce. The entire human race needs the help of the Holy Spirit to grow spiritually. It is never too late as long as one is still alive; he/she can still grow spiritually.

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