

Growing God's People Across Generations—  
A Model for Education

The concept of God as a parent is not new. Isaiah 46: 3 describes God as bearing Israel from His belly, carrying them from the womb. Isaiah 1: 2 describes notes, “I reared children and brought them up, but they rebelled against me.” As we seek to understand the process that God goes through in rearing the infant nation of Israel, the people that He calls His own, we quickly recognize that this is not a cut-and-dried process. There are many challenges that arise in the parenting of a people, and we can find similarities in the challenges we face as we raise and educate our own children. As we identify stages of development of God's people that correspond with human development, we can also identify methods God used at each stage which can give us direction and wisdom in our own work.

**In the Desert**

**Ages 0-2**

After great trouble and “travail” in Egypt—witness the ten plagues—Israel was brought through the Red Sea as an unformed people whom God cared for as if they were infants. This care was concrete, consistent, and responsive, critical for the development of attachment and a sense of trust. God fed them manna from heaven on a daily basis, and provided water directly through His own providence—often from a rock. He was visually present in the form of a cloud by day, and a pillar of fire by night, and was visible in the middle of their camp in a sanctuary as

a cloud hanging above the Most Holy Place. When the cloud moved, they moved, and when the cloud stopped, they stopped.

Discipline was also concrete and corporal in the form of plague, fire, earthquake and the ground opening up, and poisonous snakes. The children of Israel could not enter the Promised Land until they submitted to God's leading. A whole generation that balked at God's direction was laid to rest in the wilderness. It was the next generation which *submitted to God's will*, and only then was able to follow God into Canaan through the river Jordan.

This period roughly corresponds to the period of infancy, or 0 to 2 years of age. Erik Erikson, in his psychosocial stages of development, identified "Trust versus Mistrust" and "Autonomy versus Shame and Doubt" as important developmental crises during these early years. Piaget titled this stage as "Sensory Motor," acknowledging the role of the senses and manipulation of materials as the foundation of cognitive function. Babies grasp and wave, pound and squeeze, drop and tear materials as they explore their environment with all the senses of seeing, hearing, tasting, smelling and touching on full alert. They must *experience things themselves* in order to understand the world. You may tell a baby, don't touch—it's hot. But they don't know what hot is—until they touch something hot.

While sensory motor experiences are the only way babies learn, we never outgrow this absolutely fundamental requirement for learning. All learning is connected to the affect, the emotions. Learning must be connected to prior experiences, what has personally been felt and tasted, smelled and heard and seen. We learn primarily through the senses, by manipulating materials and events and seeing what happens as a result. Trust is the foundation for the

development of conscience and social relationships, and fundamental to understanding the role of authority in our lives—not only for the very young, but for all ages.

2 Peter 1: 5-7 outlines a list of traits of character that can be viewed as a ladder of development. For the very young, the first two are most important. “Make every effort to add to your faith, goodness.” Faith corresponds to trust, critical in the first stages of development. The next trait, goodness, also is part of early character development. Proverbs 20:11 says, “Even a child is known by his actions. He is known by whether his conduct is pure and right.” When a child submits his will to parental authority and does what is right, they are doing what is good. They are obeying. The hymn “Trust and Obey” (Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal #590) reiterates these two fundamental traits of character which are taught while infants are still in-arms.

## **Prophets and Kings**

### **Ages 2-7**

Once the children of Israel was in Canaan, God gave explicit instructions for their behavior. While they had learned to submit to God’s leading in some circumstances, they still hadn’t learned the critical lesson of obedience as a people. God spent the next several hundred years demonstrating the importance of relying on Him for direction, and following His law. Over and over, the people disobeyed God’s law and did their own thing. God used natural and logical consequences to demonstrate the cause and effect of their actions. When they obeyed, things went well. Jericho fell. They won battle after battle. When they left God, He left them to suffer the predations of the marauding peoples around them. When they were too miserable to stand their circumstances and turned back to God, He raised up leaders to remind them of His power and authority, and His ability to make things right, and peace came back again.

Eventually, after hundreds of years of increasing apostasy, the ten tribes of Israel were lost. Even the two tribes of Judah were captured and exiled to Babylon. This was a very long time-out—a logical consequence—and resulted in the loss of their sovereignty. But a remnant came back, 50,000 compared to the two million that came out of Egypt. As this remnant stood in the rain, whole families together listening to Ezra reading the law, they recognized as a nation that keeping God’s law was essential to their well-being, and they vowed to keep it. They learned to *submit to the law of God*.

The ages of 2-7 roughly corresponds with Erikson’s stage of “Initiative versus Guilt”, and Piaget’s stage of pre-operational cognitive functioning. Peck and Havighurst (1960), researchers in the development of character, identified this stage of character development as expedient, which corresponds with Kohlberg’s pre-conventional stage of moral development. Children may obey, but for their own purposes—to gain reward, or to avoid punishment. Motivation for keeping rules is still often external, coming from outside the child.

Piaget noted that young children must *create their own knowledge*. The world and knowledge doesn’t evolve or change as children manipulate it, but as young children splash in the water, make mud balls, and do all the messy explorations that we call a child’s work, their brain subconsciously constructs a schematic of how things work, the laws by which the world operates.

A five-year-old may agree that two balls of clay are equal. When one is rolled out, however, the young child will insist that there is more in the roll, because it looks like more. The same child at seven will insist that even though the roll looks like more, no clay was added in the process, so there is still the same amount. We call this mental growth the development of logical

thinking, the conservation of mass, in this case. The child's manipulation of materials as well as a degree of maturation of the brain helps him or her develop an understanding of the natural laws of the world in which we live. The child may not be able to articulate all the rules their subconscious mind is busy constructing, but they are coming to a knowledge of how the world works, how people work, how language works, and how God works.

We raised our children in Montana near a pathway regularly traveled by grizzly bears. The children took bears for granted. My oldest, when he was five, insisted that a bear lived in the "dark spot," about 12 feet of space beneath the eaves of the roof, next to his bedroom. I tried to explain that if a bear actually lived there, we would hear it moving around. How would it get food and water without regularly coming up and down the living room stairs? How could a bear get in and out of the house without us seeing it? But all my explanations and arguments never shook his confidence that a bear lived in the "dark spot." Then one day when he was seven, Josh came thundering down the stairs in great excitement. "There isn't any bear in the dark spot!" he exclaimed.

"There isn't?" I said. "How do you know?"

"Because I went from one end of the dark spot to the other, and there isn't any bear!!"

Time—and his own personal experience—finally accomplished what all our arguments could not do.

2 Peter 1: 5-7 notes that to goodness is added knowledge, and to knowledge is added self-control. The character traits of knowledge and self-control are important areas of development in the preschool years. As young children create their own knowledge of how the world operates, they also must learn how to respond appropriately to events around them, learning to

respond with self-control rather than impulsive behavior. “Strength of character consists of two things—power of will and power of self-control” (Child Guidance, p. 161) E.G. White urges that “Too much importance cannot be placed on the early training of children. The lessons that the child learns during the first seven years of life have more to do with forming his character than all that it learns in future years.” (Child Guidance, p. 193)

## **Christ Faces His People**

### **Ages 7-12**

After the 70-year exile, the return to Israel and the rebuilding of Jerusalem’s walls and temple, there is a period of profound silence in the scriptures. The first 490 years of Israel’s experiences are described in great detail—the next 490 years are not. The Biblical narrative is picked up near the end of this second chance for Israel, when the long-awaited Messiah shows up on the scene. Jesus finds His people well versed in the law. They don’t have a problem with keeping commandments; they have created so many laws that only the most privileged, the most holy of the holy people can hope to keep them all. The challenge for the leadership and for the people of Israel now is, can they recognize the reason for the law? Do they acknowledge and love the Giver of the Law? Can they recognize and accept Christ as their Creator, their personal Savior, as the King of their nation?

“You tithe the mint and the cumin, which is right and good, but you don’t recognize mercy and righteousness and justice,” Jesus told them (Matt. 23:23). “You study the Scriptures diligently because you think that in them you have eternal life. These are the very Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life” (John 5:39, 40).

Not only was it important for His people to identify and accept Him as the One promised to them as their Savior and Messiah, but Jesus was trying to help them recognize that the kingdom He was trying to set up was a spiritual kingdom. He was trying to help them understand the principles behind the rules. He explained that calling someone a fool was breaking the law as much as “Thou shalt not murder,” because it damaged someone else, perhaps forever (Matt. 5:21, 22).

Thinking an adulterous thought was all it took to break the “Thou shalt not commit adultery” law, because it violated the principle of health and happiness on which the law was based (Matt. 5: 27, 28). A rule that you didn’t have to help your parents if you gave your property to the temple, violated the right parents had to expect support from their children (Mark 7: 9-13). Loving and serving people was more important than following tradition and programs. God’s law was a description of how God expected His children to love and serve Him, and to love and serve each other. The law of God described the principles of justice and mercy, and if you find yourself violating these principles in following your idea of law, Jesus was saying, you need to be doing something different.

By the time most children reach seven years of age, they have a wide variety of material and social experiences under their belt. These personal, hands-on experiences help them mature to the point where they can think logically, the concrete cognitive operations that Piaget identifies. Many school-aged children understand the need for rules; they like things to be fair, and they like games with rules. This is the stage of conformity, as Peck and Havighurst (1960) identified this stage of character development, or conventional moral development, as Kohlberg labeled it.

Children may stay in the expedient stage of development rather than moving on to the conforming stage. We all know people who have grown to adulthood, but still behave expediently. They are still primarily concerned about their own needs and perspectives, and only comply with rules when they can't get away with ignoring them. However, many school-age children do develop a sense of social responsibility, and a willingness to follow social and moral laws that enhance the ability of everyone to get along well together. Erikson identified the development of "Industry versus Inferiority" as important during this time, when children *develop competence* in more and more complex social, physical, and mental skills.

The age of 7-12 is a relatively quiet stage of development that falls after the spectacular development of logic, and before the challenging years of puberty and young adulthood. This is the period when we find most decisions for baptism are made. These children understand that they owe their life to the God that made them, and they want to love and serve Jesus with all their hearts.

Baptism is a public and physical act, demonstrating that we *submit to the cross of Christ*. We accept His death on our behalf. We die to self, and accept the life of Christ as our own. We announce our personal decision to accept God's Word as truth, and our desire to identify with the body of Christ. As we examine people (adults!) in Jesus' time who learned to identify themselves as followers of Christ, we can see that this process isn't a simple formula of development, however.

Nicodemous, a sincere and devout Pharisee, met secretly with Jesus, trying to figure out who He really was and what He was really about. Jesus didn't flatter his secret visitor, a prominent leader of His people. "You need to be born again," Jesus told him. And what was it

that would bring about conversion and new birth? Confrontation with Jesus on the cross. “I, if I be lifted up, will draw all men unto me!” Jesus declared. For two years Nicodemous studied Jesus, as Jesus went about His work. God on earth, Master Teacher that He was, took two years to convince Nicodemous of His true identity—and it was finally seeing Jesus crucified that did it.

Peter was an outspoken believer in the true identity of Christ. But it took his own weakness and betrayal of Christ, and Christ’s humility and compassion toward him during the farce of a trial, to break Peter’s heart, and to convince him that there was nothing he could do to save himself from his pride and self-centered nature. It was this utter brokenness and recognition of His utter need for Christ, which led to Peter’s full conversion.

A person may or may not be fully converted at baptism. When and how conversion happens is different for each person, as it was for Nicodemous and Peter. Part of the conversion process is the baptism of the Holy Spirit, but this also may not be an easily identifiable part of baptism by water and conversion. After Jesus returned to His Father, He promised the gift of the Holy Spirit. This special event happened on the day of Pentecost, fifty days after the Passover and Christ’s crucifixion, when tongues of fire fell on the 120 followers of Jesus meeting together in an upper room. The gift of the Holy Spirit was the early rain, and preceded the explosive growth of the early church. We are now praying for the later rain, which will precede the final harvest of God’s people in the last days. In preparation for that last great work of the Holy Spirit on earth, however, each of us needs the early rain, a daily baptism of the Holy Spirit whose work in our life prepares our heart for the later rain. (Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers p. 506-512)

Baptism, conversion, and the gift of the Holy Spirit may happen all together, or they may come at different times over years of growth. In the case of the gentile Cornelius and his family and close friends, Peter argued that since they had obviously already received the Holy Spirit while Peter was talking to them, they should be baptized (Acts 10:44-48). The new birth, spiritual rebirth, is a process that should keep happening on a daily basis. The heart that once was stone, God makes into flesh, sensitive and responsive to His ways (Ez. 36:26). The laws that were external now become internal principles that guide the life, in the process of sanctification.

The progression of character traits described in 2 Peter 1: 5-7 adds perseverance and godliness to the initial list of faith, goodness, knowledge and self-control. The later years of childhood are a prime time to focus on perseverance, a term similar to Erikson's "industry." This is a time of consolidation of earlier skills, and an on-going, unwearied refinement of them. This is a time when children learn to be efficient, to work hard at accomplishing a goal, and developing competence. Godliness, or piety, comes from growing a relationship with God, a religious devotion to Him. Identifying with Christ's death and life signified in baptism, conversion, and a daily baptism of the Holy Spirit, are critical steps in the development of a godly life.

## **The Young Church**

### **Ages 12-30**

On His first visit to the temple at the age of 12, Jesus observed the sacrifices of the sanctuary services. It was then that He began to more fully understand His role as the Lamb of God. "Should I not be about my Father's business?" He asked His parents when they came to

find Him. Yet the scriptures are quiet about the time of Jesus' development between the ages of 12 and 30, except that He went home and was subject to His parents. We know He worked in His Father's carpentry shop during those years. We have a better idea of what happened between the years of 17 and 30 in Joseph's period of development, which may give some insight into Jesus' life. Jesus, like Joseph, had brothers that made life hard for Him. Nazareth was a wicked town, and it took a great deal of patience and integrity to faithfully follow the carpenter's humble calling for 18 years, before God called Him to his public ministry.

In character development, the move from conformity to what Peck and Havighurst called altruistic behavior, (Kohlberg's stage of conventional morality) is a move from obeying because it's the rule, toward understanding why a rule is good, and obedience based on commitment to principles of right and wrong. It involves a willingness to challenge or change a policy or person-made rule when it is no longer beneficial, in an attempt to selflessly do whatever is right and caring for others. This takes the ability to think abstractly, what Piaget called formal cognitive operations.

The ability to think abstractly may happen sometime after a child turns 12, but not necessarily. As you recall, development may fixate at any stage. Peck and Havighurst (1960) actually conducted their research on character development with children who were 10 years and older, and found that character development had already occurred by the age of 10, and only rarely did it change after that age—usually because of some relationship that drew the person to another level of character development. Less than half of the young adults who enter college are actually thinking formally during problem-solving situations (Day, 1981).

For the Jewish nation, thirty was the age when a man was called into priestly ministry. We have just begun to understand why 30 is an important age in terms of development. Researchers of the adolescent brain have learned that the explosion of brain development terms of in the production of neurons, what we once thought only happened in infancy, happens again during adolescence. During this time, the brain is in such a stage of fluid development that it is particularly vulnerable to drug use and genetically staged diseases as schizophrenia. The brain doesn't fully mature until around the age of 25. This is the age when young adults are best able to think strategically (Albert & Steinberg, 2011).

Adolescence and young adulthood is a period when many young people begin to search for an understanding of the bigger picture of life on this planet—who they are, why they are, what is freedom and goodness and beauty. They are idealistic. The Jewish writer and poet Hannah Senesh immigrated alone to Israel when she was seventeen. She was dedicated to Zionism and the growing nation of Israel. She stayed on to work in a kibbutz. But when Nazi Germany threatened her home country of Hungary, she had, what she termed in her diary, the “sudden idea” that she should help her fellow Jews in Europe, and especially her mother who was still in Hungary. The sudden idea turned into what she felt was a calling.

Hannah and 25 others parachuted into several countries in Eastern Europe. Just as the German tanks rolled onto Hungarian soil, Hannah crossed the river from Yugoslavia into her home country. She was immediately captured. In the ensuing process of being jailed and tried, she was deeply distressed to find that in her attempt to save her mother, she had put her mother in even graver danger. Hannah was executed within months. The last poem she wrote was found concealed in her clothing, along with a farewell note to her mother. “Now, in the month of

July, I am 23 years of age. In a daring game of numbers I placed my bet, the dice rolled, I lost”  
(The Hannah Senesh Legacy Foundation).

Many of the revolutions of this world have been fought by young adults on fire with what ought to be. Perhaps they are a bit egocentric, as they charge forward in the conviction that they are the ones to bring about world change, and perhaps short-sighted, not considering the cost if their dreams fail. But how much ground has been gained because of their passion and energy-- how much inspiration from their courage and selflessness.

Our Seventh-day Adventist church was established by such young people who faced great odds in their determination to search out the truths of the Bible and build a church on this foundation alone. They left the churches of their parents and faced tremendous difficulties in funding and building the early church ministries in publishing, education, and health, at great personal cost.

The period between 12 and 30 is a time when young adults are struggling to identify who they are. Erikson identifies the developmental tasks of this period as “Identity versus role confusion,” and “Intimacy versus Isolation.” Relationships to others become more and more important. The physical changes and the hormones of puberty create tumultuous feelings that can be hard to understand. Pressures arise from peers and parents as well as from within themselves toward conformity and toward resistance to conformity on a multitude of issues. How do they relate to their parents, their friends? How do they know who—and what--to believe? What are they good at? What do they really want to do with their lives? Where should they go to college? What should they major in? Who should they marry? When? What jobs should they go after? Where should they live? Should they have children? Should they go to

church? Why? How do they fit in with the church? All these questions deal with identity and relationships, critical issues during adolescence and young adulthood. None of them are answered easily and quickly, perhaps even less easily and quickly during these days of earth's history than for past generations.

It is a small wonder that young adults are constantly questioning themselves and questioning the institutions that they grew up with. These are the developmental tasks appropriate for this stage of their lives. They may seem egocentric due to all this introspection, and they do tend to challenge authority, due to their circumspection of the boundaries and prescriptions that have outlined their world. But not only are these important tasks for the young adult, this work is also critical for the health of society.

Thomas Jefferson once described the need for rebellion every twenty years or so, even if it was based on ignorance. He argued that if people had misconceptions and didn't get upset because of them, it was due to lethargy, and the next step was death for public liberty (Jefferson, 1787). When young adults wonder why our church services need to be so predictable, or why we don't talk to other people sitting on our same pew, or why we shouldn't wear jewelry, or what's so important about being a remnant people, we as a church body have to look at ourselves through younger eyes, and rethink what we've gotten used to doing and saying, or not doing and not saying.

Young adults mature at different rates because their natures and experiences are each so different. My youngest child, 26-year-old Sarah, is a naturalist. She has always had a scientific turn of mind; at age five, I remember her gazing for many minutes into a little puddle of water, walking slowly around it, touching pieces of rock with her toe. She was supposed to be helping

her brother and sisters carry our jugs of drinking water from the spring to the car. But because she was so deeply involved with her observations at the little pool, I didn't disturb her. She was fascinated with the pool—and I was fascinated with watching her depth of concentration and introspective deliberation.

At 17, Sarah went into a deep depression that lasted for much of three years. For many months she was away at academy, and every time she called home, she was crying. She didn't understand grace. It didn't matter how I explained it, she couldn't believe me. She didn't understand surrender. She felt even worse because she had grown up Adventist, and she figured she should understand this better—but she didn't feel loved and accepted by God, no matter what she did, or what anyone else said to help.

During her senior year at academy, a pastor and his wife shared 13 weeks of lessons on grace. “I began to understand grace, as we studied these lessons,” Sarah says now. “But it wasn't until I had to prepare a ShareHim sermon on the topic of grace on a student mission trip to Bolivia that I really understood what grace is.” That trip happened the spring of her senior year. She still didn't feel accepted and loved by God, however. At the end of the summer, she was riding bareback. The horse suddenly changed gait and took off, leaving Sarah behind. “As soon as I hit the ground, I knew two things; I knew I was very badly hurt.” (The fall had broken her back.) “And I knew that God loved me.”

I share the stories of Josh and the bear, and Sarah and grace, to illustrate the need for time and personal experience, and how these blend to support maturation in both young children and adolescents. Comments that illustrate similar struggles in the development of a relationship to God and the church come from a young adult woman in one of our focus groups. In these

comments you can hear the effort to conform to rules with little evidence of an understanding of the principles behind the rules, or of a relationship with God that makes sense, and brings meaning and purpose and joy into the life.

*Sometimes I feel like it's a curse in a way, like knowing so much, I just can't live. Sometimes I feel kind of like I'm glad, because the joy that I can have is so much more than I feel like my other friends of other faiths [have.] But at the same time there are times when I just really feel like it's suffocating.*

*Sometimes I just want to see a movie and not feel guilty. Just live without having to wondering "what's God thinking" and I know that sounds really bad, and now I feel bad saying that. Easier. I would want the church to be easier. Easier in temperament. Easier in its demands. Easier in its understanding of what we believe. . . . That would be a \*starts to cry\* a blessing. What makes me emotional is the sense that I feel almost like it's not possible to be the Adventist we're supposed to be. . . . it's impossible to be what I am.*

*Could I just be wrong? Not only could I be wrong, but could we just all have it wrong? And instead this is just a blankie. Are we really tapping into something or are we just tapping into a sense of comfort? ASDA2-FA4*

This young woman has deep, agonizing questions. No pat answers can help her. She is on a search, a journey that she must make with God toward an intimate relationship and development of a knowledge of God. This journey can take a lot of time. Some crises may urge her development toward a more mature understanding of God—or they may result in a decision that turns her away from him (Matthew 19:15-17). It is painful for us to listen to this struggle. But young people long for listening ears. They are telling us that they have a hard time finding the

opportunity to share their perplexities, their hard questions, their confusion, and their grappling with various aspects of their beliefs, without parents and church members expressing judgment and impatience at the process.

The more we have struggled ourselves in similar ways, the more empathetic we are likely to be in accepting and listening and loving those who are in the grip of this battle. Marcia (1993) notes several states of development of a sense of identity. Identity diffusion is a state in which a person has not been able to come to an integrated sense of identity. Moratorium is an active search for identity, though a person may put the search somewhat on hold to become a part of a university student body or a member of the armed forces. Foreclosure is where a person accepts the identity of their parents or other persons as their own, rather than forge their own sense of identity; identity achievement happens when an integrated sense of identity is achieved through a conscious process of examining and accepting or rejecting various aspects of belief and cultural systems as his or her own.

Interestingly, persons who have come to a sense of identity through foreclosure tend to be judgmental, inflexible, and close-minded. Since they haven't questioned their beliefs and defining cultural practices, they don't understand others who do. They also avoid situations and sources that threaten their beliefs, protecting themselves from information that might cause them to question the beliefs they hold (Baltazar & Coffen, 2011). The judgmental attitudes that young adults may be feeling from the church at large may be coming from adults who haven't explored their own belief systems for a long time, or may never have gone through that process, and are deeply uncomfortable with questions that challenge the foundations of their faith.

Not only are young people working on understanding who they are, what they believe, and what they want to do with their lives, but at the heart of this process of identity development is learning to understand what God has called them to do for Him. The church is Christ's body on earth, and He has given to each one of us gifts "to prepare God's people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4: 7-12). It is often within the church itself, as it accomplishes the work of Christ, that young people are called to fill a position that helps them recognize what is the work that Christ has prepared for them for them to do (Ephesians 2:10). Young adulthood is an important time for them to *find their niche*, and to *submit to the work God has called them to do*, becoming active in the work of the church.

The importance of relationships during this period of development corresponds with 2 Peter 1:7, which adds brotherly kindness to the list of character traits. During this time, young people become very sensitized to issues of social justice. Today, the treatment of homosexuals in the church is a particularly polarizing issue between young adults and older members of the church. Homophobia is the new racism for this generation, and young adults struggle with being part of a church that they perceive has little compassion for their friends and family members who face a terrible fight to be understood and loved, who have a terrible time understanding and loving themselves, because of their homosexual orientation.

## **The Mature Church**

**Ages 30+**

The last stage of development of God's people that we will consider, is the mature church. Erikson identifies "Generativity versus Stagnation" as a stage where most adults contribute to society. Ephesians describes the gifts that God gives as preparing His people for works of service, "so that the body of Christ may be built up until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ (Eph. 4:12, 13). "Speaking the truth in love, we will in all things grow up into him who is the Head, that is, Christ. From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work" (Eph. 4: 15, 16).

Unity and the work of the church, promoting the glory of God to the universe, is where individuals and members of the body of Christ find their greatest meaning and fulfillment. The individual gifts mentioned in 1 Corinthians 12 find their outcome in building up the church. God's intent, Paul notes is that "through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known to the rulers and authorities in the heavenly realms" (Ephesians 3:10, 11). This is the goal, the plan God has for His church.

Young adults need mentoring from older adults who have had much experience in the ways of God, who *keep the faith*. Young adults benefit from the perspective of elders in the church, the patience of those who have seen that some things take time. The church needs the wisdom of leadership who have persevered in trenches, who have endured long dry seasons where their faith was tested, and who have seen their faith rewarded: leaders like Abraham, Jacob, Job, Moses, Daniel, and Paul, and leaders like Ruth, Deborah, Esther, Mary, and E.G. White. Young adults have little patience, however, with the church's hide-bound tendencies to

grow more conservative as the years advance, forgetting that God's ways are always fresh and innovative, sensitive, but not bound to cultural traditions.

The seven churches in Revelation document the various challenges that mature churches face. These include false teachers and doctrine, loss of passion and sense of mission, secularism, complacency, and little recognition of their need for God. There are threats to churches that don't match up to God's calling; God threatens to spit the Laodicean church out of His mouth. We know that God will eventually be victorious in developing a people that mirror His character, but we don't know just how the Laodicean church will improve its condition except by complying with God's demand to buy *from Him*, raiment and ointment and gold refined in the fire. This is an interesting command, considering this church is rich and does not consider it has much of any need at all; unless, perhaps, it sees itself not only reflected in the eyes of God, but in the eyes of its children.

Many passages in the New Testament deal with the law and righteousness by faith, helping the developing church understand the relationship between the two. As late as 1888, however, the Adventist church at large has struggled with understanding the limits of the law, and the critical importance of relying only on Jesus' righteousness for salvation, and His power for sanctification. Are we making progress in understanding this as a people? The term "irrational conscientiousness" is used to describe an incomplete understanding of moral principle. In some things, a person may understand deep principles of right and wrong, but in other things, they are still bound by rigid and immature concepts that keep them from being consistently selfless and loving. Kohlberg believed that only a few people, such as Gandhi and Christ ever reached full moral development. However, Christ promises that He will have a

spotless church, a fully developed people that will perfectly represent Him. And only He has the power to accomplish this.

Not only do young adults face their own issues in developing a personal relationship with God and a recognition of their unique gifts and how these gifts add to the body of Christ, but the idealism of young adults can be shaken when they realize that the body of Christ isn't perfectly developed, or may even be in a state of decay. It can be a challenge to recognize that the church is faulty because each of us, just as faulty as the next person, are the church! It is our individual responsibility to fulfill God's calling, His purpose for us, to build up the church, so that together we may attain "the whole measure of the fullness of Christ" (Ephesians 4:12). The church is all of us, a family growing up together. We need to learn from each other, support each other, and love each other, taking lessons from Christ's love for us.

"For this reason," Paul declares, "I kneel before the Father, from whom his whole family in heaven and on earth derives its name. I pray that out of his glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith. And I pray that you, being rooted and established in love, may have power, together with all the saints, to grasp how wide and long and high and deep is the love of Christ, and to know this love that surpasses knowledge—that you may be filled to the measure of all the fullness of God" Eph. 3:14-19.

1 Peter 1: 7 ends the list of character traits with love. Love is the over-arching expression of God's character that fulfills the law of God (Rom. 13:10). The compassion of Christ in His response to the woman caught in sexual sin illustrates how love is mercy and justice in balance. Christ's first reaction to the confrontation was to bend over and write in the dust. His second

was to say, “The one without sin should cast the first stone.” Again He wrote in the dust. He never answered the arguments, determined blame or sorted out consequences. His response reduced the heat and tension.

After the accusers left, Jesus asked the woman, “Where are your accusers? He repeated the question until she affirmed that they were gone, and then He replied that He didn’t condemn her either. Four times it was stressed that she was free of accusation and condemnation before she was free to go. However, Jesus told her, go and sin no more. He didn’t justify the sin or approve a lifestyle of sin, but over and over offered understanding and acceptance without judgment. Mary Magdalene, a harlot from whom the devil was cast out seven times, became one of Christ’s most faithful followers. How does God value those He has saved from such evil? About her vision of the final coronation of Christ in the *Great Controversy*, Mrs. White writes:

Nearest the throne are those who were once zealous in the cause of Satan, but who, plucked as brands from the burning, have followed their Savior with deep, intense devotion. Next are those who perfected Christian characters in the midst of falsehood and infidelity, those who honored the law of God when the Christian world declared it void, and the millions, of all ages, who were martyred for their faith. And beyond is the “great multitude, which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, . . . before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands.” Revelation 7: 9 (*Great Controversy*, p. 665)

If older church members and young adults could both learn to respond to homosexuality and other sins like Jesus responds to them, wouldn’t we be less polarized on these issues?

It is God's love that awakens and strengthens all the traits of character whereby we reflect the glory of God to the universe—and we need each other in order to demonstrate this principle to the universe. It is through families and relationships to each other and God that love is grown and tested, until it becomes a compelling illustration of God's redemptive power, goodness, and selfless love for all creation.

## Biblical Model of Development Illustrated through the History of God's People

God's People	Age of the Child	Stage of Character and Moral Development (Peck and Havighurst and Kohlberg)	Traits of Character 1 Peter 1:5-7	Stage of Cognitive Development (Piaget)	Stage of Psychosocial Development (Erikson)	Developmental Task	Spiritual Task
In the Desert	0-2	Expedient Pre-conventional	Faith Goodness (Trust and Obey)	Sensory Motor	Trust vs. Mistrust Autonomy vs. Shame and Doubt	Experience Things Themselves	Submit the Will
Prophets and Kings	2-7	Expedient Pre-conventional	Knowledge Self-Control	Preoperational	Initiative vs. Guilt	Create Their Own Knowledge	Submit to God's Law
Christ Faces His People	7-12	Conforming Conventional	Perseverance Godliness	Concrete Operations	Industry vs. Inferiority	Develop Competence	Submit to the Cross
The Young Church	12-30	Altruistic Post-conventional	Brotherly Kindness	Formal Operations	Intimacy vs. Isolation	Find Their Niche	Submit to the Work God Has Called Them to Do

The Mature Church	30+		Love		Generativity	Keep the Faith	Submit to Pruning that Promotes Growth
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### A Model for Education

What might Seventh-day Adventist educators learn from a Biblical model of development and growth?

**The Importance of the Family.** We need to remember that the family has always been the chosen medium of education in God’s plan of development. Even the Savior, in training His twelve disciples, lived with them, and they worked beside Him as He ministered. We need to partner with our families, however they choose to educate their children, whether through homeschool, church school, or public school. Our schools are to support families, not the other way around. In order to make a lasting difference with our children, we need to do everything we can to lift up, strengthen, and edify their parents, rather than view them in an adversarial role.

We also need to respect our church school teachers who recognize the importance of homeschooling their own children, yet labor to serve families who choose to send their children to school. These teachers understand some of the highest principles of education and should be prized, instead of denied employment.

We are beginning to recognize that isolating groups of children by age is rarely a good way to minister to them. They need connections to the church, and we need them. We need to

pull together. “See,” Malachi prophesies, “I will send you the prophet Elijah before that great and dreadful day of the Lord Comes. He will turn the hearts of the fathers to their children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers; or else I will come and strike the land with a curse” (Malachi 4:5, 6).

**Developmentally Appropriate, Person-Centered, Individualized.** Developmentally appropriate practice recognizes that what we do in education should respond to the child’s needs at their stage of development, rather than require the child to fit in with a generally prescribed program. This is person-centered rather than program-centered educational practice. Person-centered education acknowledges that the purpose of education is not to cover a certain amount of content or curriculum. It is more than mental or physical training. It helps each person develop “breadth of mind, clearness of thought, and the courage of their convictions,” to achieve “everything good, and pure, and noble,” along a path of continual progress toward redemption and fitness for life in heaven (White, 1952, p. 13-19).

Every child is different, and each stage of development may take a different path for each child. As we help each young person find and fulfill their special place in the body of Christ, we recognize that they need many opportunities to seek God’s will for their own lives, and make the individual choices and decisions that help them fulfill the purpose for which God created them.

The more we externally motivate and control our children’s educational processes, the less opportunity we give them to internalize the value of learning, and own the responsibility to learn what they need to know (Lepper & Greene, 1975). Christ Himself was quite autonomous in His understanding of His purpose and educational needs from the age of twelve. We know that he refused pressure from His brothers and mother to become a part of the accepted schooling

practices of the day. We need to re-examine general education practices and the long period of dependency we are enforcing on our young people, at great financial expense, and at the expense of developing maturity and purpose. Our young people are capable of owning their own learning at a much earlier age. They are capable of doing real work and service much earlier than we have been giving them the opportunity, and it is this real experience in the real world that leads to the development of maturity and a sense of personal mission and purpose (November, 2012; Pink, 2009).

In the educational world today, we are seeing a polarization on this topic. Fast on the heels of No Child Left Behind and high-stakes testing, comes the widespread adoption of Common Core Standards among the states, creating an even stronger push toward a one-size-fits-all standardized education. On the other hand, educators such as Daniel Pink (2009), Alan November (2012), Sir Ken Robinson and Lou Aronica (2013), and Yong Zhao (2009) are warning that this standardization will fail to produce thinkers and movers and innovators so necessary for today's global economy.

Zhao (2013) urges that "We need to shift from a paradigm that ensures that every student achieves the same standardized knowledge and skills to one that enhances every student's individual strengths and nurtures his or her passions and interests." There are three critical pieces to this new paradigm:

First, learning experiences should be personalized, following each student's interests and enhancing his or her strengths because today any talent, when fully developed, can be valuable. Second, learning should be product-driven, ensuring that students are engaged in creating products and services instead of simply consuming information. Finally,

learning should occur in the broad context of globalization, and technology should be used to expand students' learning beyond the school to the globe. (Zhao, 2013, p. 59)

An early Seventh-day Adventist college educator, E.A. Sutherland (2005), writing in the early 1900's, commented on the importance of allowing choice in college course work. "It encourages the early choice of one's life work; it develops individuality; it gives a chance for individual choice and guidance; it gives opportunity to teach what the student most needs; it best holds the interest of the student; it will early reveal the capacity of the student" (Sutherland, 2005, p. 37).

**Practical. Practical. Practical.** The model of the practical apprenticeship as demonstrated by Christ in the training of His disciples is a model that is under-utilized in our education of young people today. How many teachers actually go into the field and, together with their students, put to use what they are teaching? Offering hands-on process-oriented lessons takes more time than simply covering content.

Bernice McCarthy's 4MAT framework for lessons advocates a four part approach to learning, only one of which is focused on content. Three-quarters of 4MAT lessons relate learning to past experience and the senses, practical application, and synthesis of understanding expressed meaningfully through creative expression. It is tempting for teachers, however, to minimize the process and just cover content, because high stakes testing (and most other tests) stress content.

Despite counsel that our schools should provide training in as many as possible of the most useful trades, that it is indispensable that every young person become proficient in at least some trade or handicraft, that students should become self-sustaining rather than incurring debts

or depending on the sacrifice of their parents, many of our own Seventh-day Adventist schools have stopped offering most industrial education classes. Student debt is rising, and our schools are becoming less and less affordable.

In *Education*, E.G. White (1952) notes “Even from the viewpoint of financial results, the outlay required for manual training would prove the truest economy. Multitudes of our boys would thus be kept from the street corner and the gogger” (White 1952, p. 218.) We are finding that young men especially, across the nation and in such countries as China, are suffering under the high academic content load of our schools, offered at the expense of a practical, hands-on education (Zhao, 2009; Farrar, 2013).

A PBS Parent on-line article, “Understanding and Raising Boys: Boys in School,” comments that more sit-down tasks, higher expectations for literacy at an earlier age, less hands-on learning opportunities, and less time to move and play, result in fewer boys achieving school standards. They have less opportunity to develop fluency, they have to fake more as they move up in grade levels, and the feeling of deficit becomes a part of their identity. Quoting statistics from the National Center for Educational Statistics and the U.S Board of Education, the article notes that thirty percent more boys flunk or drop out of school, two-thirds more boys are identified with special education needs, and boys are five times as likely to be identified as hyperactive. There are now more girls in higher education than boys. (PBS Parent)

Emphasis on content in schools is not necessarily producing a better product for boys or girls. In an interview by Ron Brandt on what it takes to support authentic learning, Howard Gardner referred to a study done on Harvard graduates in physics as they were throwing their caps in the air at graduation. They were asked “Why is the earth warmer in the summer than in

the winter?” Despite their very expensive, high class education, they gave the answer of a five-year-old: “The earth is closer to the sun in summer than in winter” (Brandt, 1993).

Five-year-olds may have very bright answers for a wide variety of things because of their extensive, hands-on experiences. But in many areas, they are a long way from understanding how things work based on logic and more abstract concepts that aren't visual and concrete. They need on-going real experiences to continue the kinds of authentic learning that change the brain. Once children go to school, however, their learning becomes much less hands-on and process-oriented. Gardner argued that much of elementary, secondary and higher education learning is so much powder on top of the incomplete engravings left on the child's brain by the hands-on, concrete, though limited, experiences of the preschool years. This cosmetic powder is easily dislodged, but the original engravings are not (Brandt, 1993).

Gardner described in his own graduate classes he was teaching on cognitive development. He gave two assessments periodically throughout the year: one on content, and one on understanding, where he changed the paradigms and looked to see if students were understanding the concepts that they were learning. He said, “Over the course of the term, the students' master of content zoomed up. Their understandings, on the other hand, were exactly the same: they didn't change at all. How humiliating! I could just see the headlines, “Harvard Professor of Well-Regarded Courses Documents That His Own Students Don't Understand” (Brandt, 1993, p. 7).

Gardner's recommendation? “We've got to do a lot fewer things in school. The greatest enemy of understanding is coverage. . . You've got to take enough time to get kids deeply

involved in something so they can think about it in lots of different ways and apply it—not just at school but at home and on the street and so on” (Brandt, 1993, p. 7).

In *The Global Achievement Gap: Why Even Our Best Schools Don't Teach the New Survival Skills Our Children Need—and What We Can Do*, Tony Wagner (2010) comments that in today's world, content by itself is not what is critical for a rigorous school program. “It's no longer how much you know that matters; it's what you can do with what you know.” It is a practical education that is in great demand today, the ability to use common sense and divergent in a variety of situations to problem-solve real challenges in the real world.

We are teaching students what to think, and not how to think. When it comes to assisting young people establish religious identity, Baltazar and Coffen (2011) recommend that educators promote the following kinds of activities in the context of sincere relationships:

- 1) Adventure-based activities that allow exploration of individual and team roles
- 2) Promote dialogue with friends and admired adults beyond the group mentality
- 3) Avoid slogans that stall identity development, such as WWJD, or Jesus Saves
- 4) Model and support consideration of alternative perspectives and free choice
- 5) Show the deep philosophical nature of religion, rather than focus on behavior
- 6) Guide youth to confront and resolve doubt, rather than avoid or ignore doubt

Our blueprint for Adventist education has always included elements of the importance of the family, and a developmentally appropriate, person-centered approach to education with an emphasis on the whole child that is both individualized and practical. However, we are at a cross roads where we need to seriously consider past trends in not only society's educational traditions, but our own. As we consider the needs of our youth today, and the future of the

church, we can gain great insight and hope from the model of Christ as parent and educator throughout the Scriptures.

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