**TRIBE**

*Sermon script to go with the PowerPoint slides.*

Who is your tribe? In many societies today, people live in quite isolated family units, or even alone. The value of the extended family and community is sometimes not as highly-prized as it is in cultures where people’s tribes and families play a much stronger role.

**SLIDE**: Someone once humorously said, “When you find people who not only tolerate your crazy ways, but celebrate them with glad cries of “Me, too!”, be sure to cherish them, because those people are your tribe!” ☺

Our tribe can be defined as our immediate family, our extended family, our church family, our community, or even our global family. As God’s stewards, or managers, we are called to take good care of our tribe, our family.

**SLIDE**: Today, let’s try to answer the question, “How can I better care for my tribe—my immediate family, my church family and my global family?”

**SLIDE**: Rick Hoyt was born on January 10, 1962 in Massachusetts and was sadly diagnosed as a quadriplegic with cerebral palsy at birth after his umbilical cord became twisted around his neck, which caused the blockage of oxygen flow. Many doctors encouraged the Hoyts to institutionalize Rick, informing them that he would be nothing more than a "vegetable.”

His parents held on to the fact that Rick's eyes would follow them around the room, giving them hope that he would somehow be able to communicate someday. The Hoyts took Rick every week to Children's Hospital in Boston, where they met a doctor who encouraged the Hoyts to treat Rick like any other child. Rick's mother Judy spent hours each day teaching Rick the alphabet with sandpaper letters and posting signs on every object in the house. In a short amount of time, Rick learned the alphabet.

At the age of 11, Rick was fitted with a computer that enabled him to communicate, and it became clear that Rick was intelligent. With this communication device, Rick was also able to attend public schools for the first time, and in 1993 he graduated from Boston University with a degree in special education.

**SLIDE**: In 1977, at the age of 17, Rick asked his father Dick if they could run in a race together to raise money for a student at his school who had become paralyzed. He wanted to prove that life went on no matter your disability. Dick Hoyt, a retired Lieutenant Colonel in the Air National Guard, was not a runner and was 36 years old.

After their first race Rick said, **"Dad, when I’m running, it feels like I’m not handicapped."** Can you imagine how Rick’s father felt when he heard those words from his son? Dick began running every day with a bag of cement in the wheelchair because Rick was at school and studying, unable to train with him.

**SLIDE**: Since that day, the Hoyts have competed together in various athletic endeavours, including marathons and Ironman Triathlons. For the swimming races, Dick pulls Rick in a special boat. For cycling Dick carries Rick in a special seat on the front of the bike. And when they run Dick pushes Rick in a special wheelchair.

As of March 2016, the Hoyts had competed in 1,130 endurance events, including 72 marathons and six Ironman Triathlons. They had run the Boston Marathon 32 times. They biked and ran across the U.S. in 1992, completing 6,011 km in 45 days.

**SLIDE**: Can you begin to imagine how much of his life Dick gave just so that his son Rick could feel like he’s not handicapped? He gave his time, his treasure, his talent, his body temple, and he probably had to give up many other life dreams that he had, he gave his all, for his son. He gave His life. Because he loved him.

That’s ‘whole-of-life giving’. “I want to be a father like that! A friend like that. A church member like that. A neighbour like that.”

And yet, if you ask Rick or Dick which of them was blessed the most by Dick’s sacrificial giving to his son, they would both say that they were the one who was the most blessed.  “It is more blessed to give than to receive.” *Jesus Christ,* Acts 20:35

**SLIDE**: As in all the important aspects of our lives, God has a blueprint for how we are to faithfully manage them, and Satan has a counterfeit. There’s a great controversy going on about how we care for our tribe.

* God says: “You are your ‘brother’s keeper’.”
* Satan says, “Your #1 priority is yourself.”
* God asks us to provide for our family, especially in tough times.
* Satan says that others should provide for themselves, just like you have.
* God invites us to love and cherish our spouse just like Christ loves the church.
* Satan wants us to focus on ensuring that our spouse cares for our needs.
* God lifts up the ‘Golden Rule’: Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.
* Satan says, “It’s a dog-eats-dog world so look out for yourself at any cost to others.”
* God expands our caring by asking me to love and care for my neighbour, even if they live in another town or country, just as I love and care for myself.
* Satan tells me that it’s OK to always put my own needs in front of everyone else’s needs, especially those who don’t live near me.

Some of Satan’s ways seem right to us, but in the end they lead to the destruction of relationships and the fragmenting of our tribe.

**SLIDE**: When the Apostle Paul wrote to Timothy he talked about our tribe. “Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.” *1 Timothy 5:8 (NIV)*

**SLIDE**: Ellen White loved to write about the sacredness of the family. In the powerful book *Adventist Home* we read, “Our work for Christ is to begin with the family, in the home. ... There is no missionary field more important than this.” *(Adventist Home p.35)*

**SLIDE**: She continues with this very clear statement, “The Lord has not called you to neglect your home ... He never works in this way; and He never will.” *(Adventist Home p.246)*

Wow! That’s clear writing. It doesn’t get much easier to understand than that!

**SLIDE**: Jesus gave us principles about how we are to care for our tribe. “So whatever you wish that others would do to you, do also to them, for this is the Law and the Prophets.” *Matthew 7:12 (ESV)*

We could call this statement, ‘The Golden Rule of the Tribe’. It doesn’t matter whether we define the tribe as our closest, most immediate family, or the people living on the other side of the world who we will never meet, Jesus’ words are just as true.

We are to love all people, everywhere, because that’s how God loves, and when we love like God loves we will fulfill ‘the Law and the Prophets’.

**SLIDE**: Ellen White places a magnifying glass over Jesus’ Golden Rule when she says, “Every uttered word exerts an influence, every action involves a train of responsibility. No one can live to himself in this world, even if he would. Each one forms a part of the great web of humanity, and through our individual threads of influence we are linked to the universe.” *Ellen G. White, Review & Herald, Feb. 16, 1897*

Remember the Apostle John? He was a disciple who was very close to Jesus. He watched Jesus very closely. He watched how Jesus spoke, talked, made decisions, related to strangers and had mercy on the needy. John had a front row seat as Jesus revealed God’s love to His tribe.

**SLIDE**: When John was an old mane he wrote, “If someone says, “I love God,” and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also.” *1 John 4:20-21 (NKJV)*

Love is at the very heart of our tribe, our family. A tribe without love simply isn’t a tribe.

**SLIDE**: In that amazingly beautiful book, *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessings*, Ellen White explains the importance and centrality of love with these words, “It is not earthly rank, nor birth, nor nationality, nor religious privilege, which proves that we are members of the family of God; it is love, a love that embraces all humanity.” *(p.75)*

How does all this relate to our immediate family, our brothers and sisters and children? When God was revealing his principles for a happy, functioning society to the ‘children of Israel’, you can see by their name that they were all one family too—the children of Israel, He gave them this advice:

**SLIDE**: “These words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up.” *Deuteronomy 6:6-7 (NKJV)*

God knows the importance of passing on values and right principles for living to our children, and our children’s children.

**SLIDE**: In *Adventist Home* we get an insight into one of the power sources for families that stay united and strong from generation to generation, “You may aid [your children] to develop characters that will not be swayed or influenced to do evil, but will sway and influence others to do right. By your **fervent prayers of faith** you can move the arm that moves the world.” *(p.264)*

What a beautiful promise for parents and grandparents who are humbly and fervently seeking to be faithful stewards of their tribe.

We all know that one of the greatest things that tears apart families is materialism. It can sneak into families in secret ways that are hardly noticeable. Maybe one child receives something that the others don’t (eg. Joseph and his coat of many colours), or one child receives less than they expected in an inheritance (eg. Jacob and Esau), or maybe the father just gets so busy making money at work so that he can give expensive things to his wife and children that the family unit fragments due to a lack of time together.

Society today seems to hold up material things in places even higher than relationships. We’re told that if we just get more things then the tribe will be happy. How sad it is when things replace relationships.

**SLIDE**: Always remember, that in the tribe of a faithful steward there is an important ‘Tribal Law’: “In an age that LOVES things and USES people, we are to LOVE people and USE things.”

That’s so important that I want to repeat it, “In an age that LOVES things and USES people, we are to LOVE people and USE things.”

Putting people above things will help to keep the tribe, the family, together. And remember, we’re not just defining the tribe as our immediate family. Our ‘neighbour’ is not just the people who live in the house next door. No, Jesus taught that we are to be a neighbour to everyone, everywhere.

Our tribe includes our local community, our nation and our global family too. Following this ‘Tribal Law’ will impact the way we shop, the way we travel, the way we consume, the way we care.

**SLIDE**: Jesus used things to love people, “He **used** mud to **love** a blind man; He **used** sand to **love** an adulteress; He **used** water and clay pots to **love** some newlyweds; He **used** loaves and fish to **love** a crowd of hungry people; He **used** his garment to **love** a bleeding woman; and finally, He **used** a cross and three nails to build a bridge of **love**.”

**SLIDE**: When it comes to our tribe, “The greatest thing we will ever learn, is just to love like God loves, and to be loved in return.”

**SLIDE**: So, how can we be faithful stewards of our tribe? A faithful steward does what their Master would do if He were present.

I encourage you to study the life of Jesus, looking at the way that He cared for His tribe—His family, His disciples, His community, everyone—and as He Himself said, “Go, and do likewise.”

**---**

I’d like to finish with a story that illustrates today’s message about being faithful stewards of our tribe.

The story is told of a man, let’s call him Peter, who received a new sports car as a gift from his brother. One day he drove it into the city and parked it on the street while he did some shopping. On returning to his car, loaded down with shopping bags, he saw a young homeless boy with wide eyes staring at the shiny, new vehicle.

As Peter approached the car the boy shyly asked, “Excuse me sir, is this your car?” “Yes, it is” Peter replied. “My brother gave it to me. It was a gift.”

The boy’s eyes lit up with surprise at the thought of such a generous and expensive gift. “Wow!” he said. “That’s incredible! I wish ... I wish ... I wish …” but he didn’t finish his sentence, so Peter finished it for him. “Yes, I know son. You wish you had a brother like that.”

“No, no, sir. That’s not it.” the boy quickly replied. “I wish ... I just wish I could BE a brother like that.”

**SLIDE**: I don’t know about you friends, but I want to BE a brother like that, a family member like that, a community member like that, a citizen like that. And with God’s help through Christ living our hearts, we can.